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The Vane Sisters—a story

JOSE ORTEGA Y GASSET:
Time, Distance, and Form in Proust

HARVEY SWADOS:
A Glance in the Mirror—a story

MARVIN MUDRICK:
The Originality of Conrad

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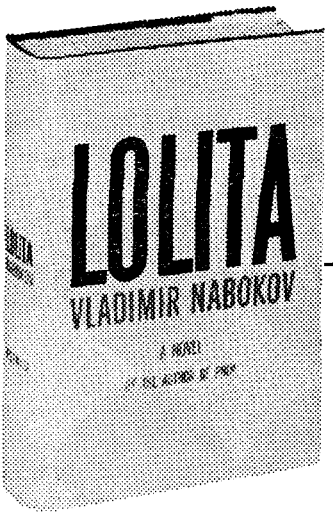

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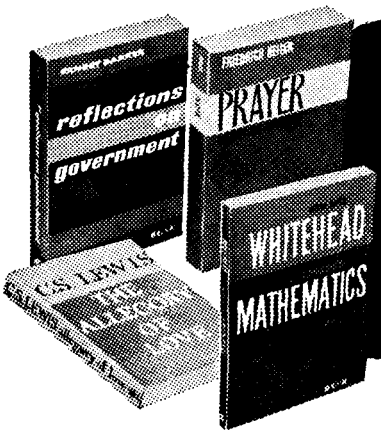

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Notes on Contributors

VLADIMIR NABOKOV'S book of short stories, *Nabokov's Dozen*, is reviewed in this issue. Puzzle-minded readers of "The Vane Sisters" may be interested in looking for the coded message that occurs on the last page of the story.

HUGH MACDIARMID (Christopher Murray Grieve) is the eminent Scottish poet whose published work includes over a dozen volumes of poetry and twice that number of prose works.

A new novel by HARVEY SWADOS is scheduled for publication this year. Mr. Swados was the Hudson Review Fellow in Fiction for 1957-58.

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VLADIMIR NABOKOV

The Vane Sisters

I MIGHT NEVER HAVE HEARD of Cynthia's death, had I not run, that night, into D., whom I had also lost track of for the last four years or so; and I might never have run into D., had I not got involved in a series of trivial investigations.

The day, a compunctious Sunday after a week of blizzards, had been part jewel, part mud. In the midst of my usual afternoon stroll through the small hilly town attached to the girls' college where I taught French literature, I had stopped to watch a family of brilliant icicles drip-dripping from the eaves of a frame house. So clear-cut were their pointed shadows on the white boards behind them that I was sure the shadows of the falling drops should be visible too. But they were not. The roof jutted too far out, perhaps, or the angle of vision was faulty, or, again, I did not chance to be watching the right icicle when the right drop fell. There was a rhythm, an alternation in the dripping that I found as teasing as a coin trick. It led me to inspect the corners of several house blocks, and this brought me to Kelly Road, and right to the house where D. used to live when he was instructor here. And as I looked up at the eaves of the adjacent garage with its full display of transparent stalactites backed by their blue silhouettes, I was rewarded at last, upon choosing one, by the sight of what might be described as the dot of an exclamation mark leaving its ordinary position to glide down very fast—a jot faster than the thaw-drop it raced. This twinned twinkle was delightful but not completely satisfying; or rather it only sharpened my appetite for other tidbits of light and shade, and I walked on in a state of raw awareness that seemed to transform the whole of my being into one big eyeball rolling in the world's socket.

Through peacocked lashes I saw the dazzling diamond reflection of the low sun on the round back of a parked automobile. To all kinds of things a vivid pictorial sense had been restored by the sponge of the thaw. Water in overlapping festoons flowed down one sloping street and turned gracefully into another. With ever so slight a note of meretricious appeal, narrow passages between

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buildings revealed treasures of brick and purple. I remarked for the first time the humble fluting—last echoes of grooves on the shafts of columns—ornamenting a garbage can, and I also saw the rippling upon its lid—circles diverging from a fantastically ancient center. Erect, dark-headed shapes of dead snow (left by the blades of a bulldozer last Friday) were lined up like rudimentary penguins along the curbs, above the brilliant vibration of live gutters.

I walked up, and I walked down, and I walked straight into a delicately dying sky, and finally the sequence of observed and observant things brought me, at my usual eating time, to a street so distant from my usual eating place that I decided to try a restaurant which stood on the fringe of the town. Night had fallen without sound or ceremony when I came out again. The lean ghost, the elongated umbra cast by a parking meter upon some damp snow, had a strange ruddy tinge; this I made out to be due to the tawny red light of the restaurant sign above the sidewalk; and it was then—as I loitered there, wondering rather wearily if in the course of my return tramp I might be lucky enough to find the same in neon blue—it was then that a car crunched to a standstill near me and D. got out of it with an exclamation of feigned pleasure.

He was passing, on his way from Albany to Boston, through the town he had dwelt in before, and more than once in my life have I felt that stab of vicarious emotion followed by a rush of personal irritation against travelers who seem to feel nothing at all upon revisiting spots that ought to harass them at every step with wailing and writhing memories. He ushered me back into the bar that I had just left, and after the usual exchange of buoyant platitudes came the inevitable vacuum which he filled with the random words: "Say, I never thought there was anything wrong with Cynthia Vane's heart. My lawyer tells me she died last week."

2

He was still young, still brash, still shifty, still married to the gentle, exquisitely pretty woman who had never learned or suspected anything about his disastrous affair with Cynthia's hysterical young sister, who in her turn had known nothing of the interview I had had with Cynthia when she suddenly summoned me to Boston to make me swear I would talk to D. and get him "kicked out" if he did not stop seeing Sybil at once—or did not divorce his wife

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(whom incidentally she visualized through the prism of Sybil's wild talk as a termagant and a fright). I had cornered him immediately. He had said there was nothing to worry about—had made up his mind, anyway, to give up his college job and move with his wife to Albany where he would work in his father's firm; and the whole matter, which had threatened to become one of those hopelessly entangled situations that drag on for years, with peripheral sets of well-meaning friends endlessly discussing it in universal secrecy—and even founding, among themselves, new intimacies upon its alien woes—came to an abrupt end.

I remember sitting next day at my raised desk in the large classroom where a midyear examination in French Lit was being held on the eve of Sybil's suicide. She came in on high heels, with a suitcase, dumped it in a corner where several other bags were stacked, with a single shrug slipped her fur coat off her thin shoulders, folded it on her bag, and with two or three other girls stopped before my desk to ask when would I mail them their grades. It would take me a week, beginning from to-morrow, I said, to read the stuff. I also remember wondering whether D. had already informed her of his decision—and I felt acutely unhappy about my dutiful little student as during one hundred and fifty minutes my gaze kept reverting to her, so childishly slight in closefitting grey, and kept observing that carefully waved dark hair, that small, small-flowered hat with a little hyaline veil as worn that season and under it her small face broken into a cubist pattern by scars due to a skin disease, pathetically masked by a sunlamp tan that hardened her features whose charm was further impaired by her having painted everything that could be painted, so that the pale gums of her teeth between cherry-red chapped lips and the diluted blue ink of her eyes under darkened lids were the only visible openings into her beauty.

Next day, having arranged the ugly copybooks alphabetically, I plunged into their chaos of scripts and came prematurely to Valevsky and Vane whose books I had somehow misplaced. The first was dressed up for the occasion in a semblance of legibility, but Sybil's work displayed her usual combination of several demon hands. She had begun in very pale, very hard pencil which had conspicuously embossed the blank verso, but had produced little of permanent value on the upperside of the page. Happily the tip soon broke, and Sybil continued in another, darker, lead, gradually

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lapsing into the blurred thickness of what looked almost like charcoal, to which, by sucking the blunt point, she had contributed some traces of lipstick. Her work, although even poorer than I had expected, bore all the signs of a kind of desperate conscientiousness, with underscores, transposes, unnecessary footnotes, as if she were intent upon rounding up things in the most respectable manner possible. Then she had borrowed Mary Valevsky's fountain pen and added: "*Cette examain est finie ainsi que ma vie. Adieu, jeunes filles!* Please, *Monsieur le Professeur*, contact *ma soeur* and tell her that Death was not better than D minus, but definitely better than Life minus D."

I lost no time in ringing up Cynthia who told me it was all over —had been all over since eight in the morning—and asked me to bring her the note, and when I did, beamed through her tears with proud admiration for the whimsical use ("Just like her!") Sybil had made of an examination in French literature. In no time she "fixed" two highballs, while never parting with Sybil's notebook— by now splashed with soda water and tears—and went on studying the death message, whereupon I was impelled to point out to her the grammatical mistakes in it and to explain the way "girl" is translated in American colleges lest students innocently bandy around the French equivalent of "wench," or worse. These rather tasteless trivialities pleased Cynthia hugely as she rose, with gasps, above the heaving surface of her grief. And then, holding that limp notebook as if it were a kind of passport to a casual Elysium (where pencil points do not snap and a dreamy young beauty with an impeccable complexion winds a lock of her hair on a dreamy forefinger, as she meditates over some celestial test), Cynthia led me upstairs, to a chilly little bedroom just to show me, as if I were the police or a sympathetic Irish neighbor, two empty pill bottles and the tumbled bed from which a tender, inessential body, that D. must have known down to its last velvet detail, had been already removed.

3

It was four or five months after her sister's death that I began seeing Cynthia fairly often. By the time I had come to New York for some vacational research in the Public Library she had also moved to that city where for some odd reason (in vague connection, I

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presume, with artistic motives) she had taken what people, immune to gooseflesh, term a "cold water" flat, low down in the scale of the city's transverse streets. What attracted me were neither her ways, which I thought repulsively vivacious, nor her looks, which other men thought striking. She had wide-spaced eyes very much like her sister's, of a frank, frightened blue with dark points in a radial arrangement. The interval between her thick black eyebrows was always shiny, and shiny too were the fleshy volutes of her nostrils. The coarse texture of her epiderm looked almost masculine, and, in the stark lamplight of her studio, you could see the pores of her thirty-two-year-old face fairly gaping at you like something in an aquarium. She used cosmetics with as much zest as her little sister had, but with an additional slovenliness that would result in her big front teeth getting some of the rouge. She was handsomely dark, wore a not too tasteless mixture of fairly smart heterogeneous things, and had a so-called good figure; but all of her was curiously frowsy, after a way I obscurely associated with left-wing enthusiasms in politics and "advanced" banalities in art, although, actually, she cared for neither. Her coily hairdo, on a part-and-bun basis, might have looked feral and bizarre had it not been thoroughly domesticated by its own soft unkemptness at the vulnerable nape. Her fingernails were gaudily painted, but badly bitten and not clean. Her lovers were a silent young photographer with a sudden laugh and two older men, brothers, who owned a small printing establishment across the street. I wondered at their tastes whenever I glimpsed, with a secret shudder, the higgledy-piggledy striation of black hairs that showed all along her pale shins through the nylon of her stockings with the scientific distinctness of a preparation flattened under glass; or when I felt, at her every movement, the dullish, stalish, not particularly conspicuous but all-pervading and depressing emanation that her seldom bathed flesh spread from under weary perfumes and creams.

Her father had gambled away the greater part of a comfortable fortune, and her mother's first husband had been of Slav origin, but otherwise Cynthia Vane belonged to a good, respectable family. For aught we know, it may have gone back to kings and soothsayers in the mists of ultimate islands. Transferred to a newer world, to a landscape of doomed, splendid deciduous trees, her ancestry presented, in one of its first phases, a white churchful of farmers

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against a black thunderhead, and then an imposing array of townsmen engaged in mercantile pursuits, as well as a number of learned men, such as Dr. Jonathan Vane, the gaunt bore (1780-1839), who perished in the conflagration of the steamer "Lexington" to become later an habitué of Cynthia's tilting table. I have always wished to stand genealogy on its head, and here I have an opportunity to do so, for it is the last scion, Cynthia, and Cynthia alone, who will remain of any importance in the Vane dynasty. I am alluding of course to her artistic gift, to her delightful, gay, but not very popular paintings which the friends of her friends bought at long intervals—and I dearly should like to know where they went after her death, those honest and poetical pictures that illumined her living room—the wonderfully detailed images of metallic things, and my favorite "Seen Through a Windshield"—a windshield partly covered with rime, with a brilliant trickle (from an imaginary car roof) across its transparent part and, through it all, the sapphire flame of the sky and a green and white fir tree.

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Cynthia had a feeling that her dead sister was not altogether pleased with her—had discovered by now that she and I had conspired to break her romance; and so, in order to disarm her shade, Cynthia reverted to a rather primitive type of sacrificial offering (tinged, however, with something of Sybil's humor), and began to send to D.'s business address, at deliberately unfixed dates, such trifles as snapshots of Sybil's tomb in a poor light; cuttings of her own hair which was indistinguishable from Sybil's; a New England sectional map with an inked-in cross, midway between two chaste towns, to mark the spot where D. and Sybil had stopped on October the twenty-third, in broad daylight, at a lenient motel, in a pink and brown forest; and, twice, a stuffed skunk.

Being as a conversationalist more voluble than explicit, she never could describe in full the theory of intervenient auras that she had somehow evolved. Fundamentally there was nothing particularly new about her private creed since it presupposed a fairly conventional hereafter, a silent solarium of immortal souls (spliced with mortal antecedents) whose main recreation consisted of periodical hoverings over the dear quick. The interesting point was a curious

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practical twist that Cynthia gave to her tame metaphysics. She was sure that her existence was influenced by all sorts of dead friends each of whom took turns in directing her fate much as if she were a stray kitten which a schoolgirl in passing gathers up, and presses to her cheek, and carefully puts down again, near some suburban hedge—to be stroked presently by another transient hand or carried off to a world of doors by some hospitable lady.

For a few hours, or for several days in a row, and sometimes recurrently, in an irregular series, for months or years, anything that happened to Cynthia, after a given person had died, would be, she said, in the manner and mood of that person. The event might be extraordinary, changing the course of one's life; or it might be a string of minute incidents just sufficiently clear to stand out in relief against one's usual day and then shading off into still vaguer trivia as the aura gradually faded. The influence might be good or bad; the main thing was that its source could be identified. It was like walking through a person's soul, she said. I tried to argue that she might not always be able to determine the exact source since not everybody has a recognizable soul; that there are anonymous letters and Christmas presents which anybody might send; that, in fact, what Cynthia called "a usual day" might be itself a weak solution of mixed auras or simply the routine shift of a humdrum guardian angel. And what about God? Did or did not people who would resent any omnipotent dictator on earth look forward to one in heaven? And wars? What a dreadful idea—dead soldiers still fighting with living ones, or phantom armies trying to get at each other through the lives of crippled old men.

But Cynthia was above generalities as she was beyond logic. "Ah, that's Paul," she would say when the soup spitefully boiled over, or: "I guess good Betty Brown is dead"—when she won a beautiful and very welcome vacuum cleaner in a charity lottery. And, with Jamesian meanderings that exasperated my French mind, she would go back to a time when Betty and Paul had not yet departed, and tell me of the showers of well-meant, but odd and quite unacceptable bounties—beginning with an old purse that contained a cheque for three dollars which she picked up in the street and, of course, returned (to the aforesaid Betty Brown—this is where she first comes in—a decrepit colored woman hardly able to walk), and ending with an insulting proposal from an old beau of hers (this is where Paul comes in) to paint "straight" pictures of his house and

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family for a reasonable remuneration—all of which followed upon the demise of a certain Mrs. Page, a kindly but petty old party who had pestered her with bits of matter-of-fact advice since Cynthia had been a child.

Sybil's personality, she said, had a rainbow edge as if a little out of focus. She said that had I known Sybil better I would have at once understood how Sybil-like was the aura of minor events which, in spells, had suffused her, Cynthia's, existence after Sybil's suicide. Ever since they had lost their mother they had intended to give up their Boston home and move to New York, where Cynthia's paintings, they thought, would have a chance to be more widely admired; but the old home had clung to them with all its plush tentacles. Dead Sybil, however, had proceeded to separate the house from its view—a thing that affects fatally the sense of home. Right across the narrow street a building project had come into loud, ugly, scaffolded life. A pair of familiar poplars died that spring, turning to blond skeletons. Workmen came and broke up the warm-colored lovely old sidewalk that had a special violet sheen on wet April days and had echoed so memorably to the morning footsteps of Museum-bound Mr. Lever, who upon retiring from business at sixty had devoted a full quarter of a century exclusively to the study of snails.

Speaking of old men, one should add that sometimes these posthumous auspices and interventions were in the nature of parody. Cynthia had been on friendly terms with an eccentric librarian called Porlock who in the last years of his dusty life had been engaged in examining old books for miraculous misprints such as the substitution of "l" for the second "h" in the word "hither." Contrary to Cynthia, he cared nothing for the thrill of obscure predictions; all he sought was the freak itself, the chance that mimics choice, the flaw that looks like a flower; and Cynthia, a much more perverse amateur of misshapen or illicitly connected words, puns, logogriphs and so on, had helped the poor crank to pursue a quest that in the light of the example she cited struck me as statistically insane. Anyway, she said, on the third day after his death she was reading a magazine and had just come across a quotation from an imperishable poem (that she, with other gullible readers, believed to have been really composed in a dream) when it dawned upon her that "Alph" was a prophetic sequence of the initial letters of Anna Livia Plurabelle (another sacred river running

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through, or rather around, yet another fake dream), while the additional "h" modestly stood, as a private signpost, for the word that had so hypnotized Mr. Porlock. And I wish I could recollect that novel or short story (by some contemporary writer, I believe) in which, unknown to its author, the first letters of the words in its last paragraph formed, as deciphered by Cynthia, a message from his dead mother.

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I am sorry to say that not content with these ingenious fancies Cynthia showed a ridiculous fondness for spiritualism. I refused to accompany her to sittings in which paid mediums took part: I knew too much about that from other sources. I did consent, however, to attend little farces rigged up by Cynthia and her two poker-faced gentlemen-friends of the printing shop. They were podgy, polite and rather eerie old fellows, but I satisfied myself that they possessed considerable wit and culture. We sat down at a light little table, and crackling tremors started almost as soon as we laid our fingertips upon it. I was treated to an assortment of ghosts who rapped out their reports most readily though refusing to elucidate anything that I did not quite catch. Oscar Wilde came and in rapid garbled French, with the usual anglicisms, obscurely accused Cynthia's dead parents of what appeared in my jottings as "*plagiatisme*." A brisk spirit contributed the unsolicited information that he, John Moore, and his brother Bill had been coal miners in Colorado and had perished in an avalanche at "Crested Beauty" in January 1883. Frederic Myers, an old hand at the game, hammered out a piece of verse (oddly resembling Cynthia's own fugitive productions) which in part reads in my notes:

What is this—a conjuror's rabbit,
Or a flawy but genuine gleam—
Which can check the perilous habit
And dispel the dolorous dream?

Finally, with a great crash and all kinds of shudderings and jig-like movements on the part of the table, Leo Tolstoy visited our little group and, when asked to identify himself by specific traits of terrene habitation, launched upon a complex description of what

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seemed to be some Russian type of architectural woodwork ("figures on boards—man, horse, cock, man, horse, cock"), all of which was difficult to take down, hard to understand and impossible to verify.

I attended two or three other sittings which were even sillier but I must confess that I preferred the childish entertainment they afforded and the cider we drank (Podgy and Pudgy were teetotalers) to Cynthia's awful house parties.

She gave them at the Wheelers' nice flat next door—the sort of arrangement dear to her centrifugal nature, but then, of course, her own living room always looked like a dirty old palette. Following a barbaric, unhygienic, and adulterous custom, the guests' coats, still warm on the inside, were carried by quiet baldish Bob Wheeler into the sanctity of a tidy bedroom and heaped on the conjugal bed. It was also he who poured out the drinks which were passed around by the young photographer while Cynthia and Mrs. Wheeler took care of the canapés.

A late arrival had the impression of lots of loud people unnecessarily grouped within a smoke-blue space between two mirrors gorged with reflections. Because, I suppose, Cynthia wished to be the youngest in the room, the women she used to invite, married or single, were, at the best, in their precarious forties; some of them would bring from their homes, in dark taxis, intact vestiges of good looks, which, however, they lost as the party progressed. It has always amazed me—the capacity sociable weekend revellers have of finding almost at once, by a purely empiric but very precise method, a common denominator of drunkenness, to which everybody loyally sticks before descending, all together, to the next level. The rich friendliness of the matrons was marked by tomboyish overtones, while the fixed inward look of amiably tight men was like a sacrilegious parody of pregnancy. Although some of the guests were connected in one way or another with the arts, there was no inspired talk, no wreathed, elbow-propped heads, and of course no flute girls. From some vantage point where she had been sitting in a stranded mermaid pose on the pale carpet with one or two younger fellows, Cynthia, her face varnished with a film of beaming sweat, would creep up on her knees, a proffered plate of nuts in one hand, and crisply tap with the other the athletic leg of Cochran or Corcoran, an art dealer, ensconced, on a pearl-gray sofa, between two flushed, happily disintegrating ladies.

At a further stage there would come spurts of more riotous gaiety.

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Corcoran or Coransky would grab Cynthia or some other wandering woman by the shoulder and lead her into a corner to confront her with a grinning embroglio of private jokes and rumors, whereupon, with a laugh and a toss of her head, she would break away. And still later there would be flurries of intersexual chumminess, jocular reconciliations, a bare fleshy arm flung around another woman's husband (he standing very upright in the midst of a swaying room), or a sudden rush of flirtatious anger, of clumsy pursuit—and the quiet half smile of Bob Wheeler picking up glasses that grew like mushrooms in the shade of chairs.

After one last party of that sort, I wrote Cynthia a perfectly harmless and, on the whole, well-meant note, in which I poked a little Latin fun at some of her guests. I also apologized for not having touched her whiskey, saying that as a Frenchman I preferred the grape to the grain. A few days later I met her on the steps of the Public Library, in the broken sun, under a weak cloudburst, opening her amber umbrella, struggling with a couple of armpitted books (of which I relieved her for a moment). "Footfalls on the Boundary of Another World," by Robert Dale Owen, and something on "Spiritualism and Christianity"; when, suddenly, with no provocation on my part, she blazed out at me with vulgar vehemence, using poisonous words, saying—through pear-shaped drops of sparse rain—that I was a prig and a snob; that I only saw the gestures and disguises of people; that Corcoran had rescued from drowning, in two different oceans, two men—by an irrelevant coincidence both called Corcoran; that romping and screeching Joan Winter had a little girl doomed to grow completely blind in a few months; and that the woman in green with the freckled chest whom I had snubbed in some way or other had written a national best seller in 1932. Strange Cynthia! I had been told she could be thunderously rude to people whom she liked and respected; one had, however, to draw the line somewhere and since I had by then sufficiently studied her interesting auras and other odds and ids, I decided to stop seeing her altogether.

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The night D. informed me of Cynthia's death I returned after eleven to the two-storied house I shared, in horizontal section, with an emeritus professor's widow. Upon reaching the porch I looked

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with the apprehension of solitude at the two kinds of darkness in the two rows of windows: the darkness of absence and the darkness of sleep.

I could do something about the first but could not duplicate the second. My bed gave me no sense of safety; its springs only made my nerves bounce. I plunged into Shakespeare's sonnets—and found myself idiotically checking the first letters of the lines to see what sacramental words they might form. I got FATE (LXX), ATOM (CXX) and, twice, TAFT (LXXXVIII, CXXXI). Every now and then I would glance around to see how the objects in my room were behaving. It was strange to think that if bombs began to fall I would feel little more than a gambler's excitement (and a great deal of earthy relief) whereas my heart would burst if a certain suspiciously tense-looking little bottle on yonder shelf moved a fraction of an inch to one side. The silence, too, was suspiciously compact as if deliberately forming a black backdrop for the nerve flash caused by any small sound of unknown origin. All traffic was dead. In vain did I pray for the groan of a truck up Perkins Street. The woman above who used to drive me crazy by the booming thuds occasioned by what seemed monstrous feet of stone (actually, in diurnal life, she was a small dumpy creature resembling a mummified guinea pig) would have earned my blessings had she now trudged to her bathroom. I put out my light and cleared my throat several times so as to be responsible for at least *that* sound. I thumbed a mental ride with a very remote automobile but it dropped me before I had a chance to doze off. Presently a crackle (due, I hoped, to a discarded and crushed sheet of paper opening like a mean, stubborn night flower)—started and stopped in the waste paper basket, and my bedtable responded with a little click. It would have been just like Cynthia to put on right then a cheap poltergeist show.

I decided to fight Cynthia. I reviewed in thought the modern era of raps and apparitions, beginning with the knockings of 1848, at the hamlet of Hydesville, N. Y., and ending with grotesque phenomena at Cambridge, Mass.; I evoked the ankle-bones and other anatomical castanets of the Fox sisters (as described by the sages of the University of Buffalo); the mysteriously uniform type of delicate adolescent in bleak Epworth or Tedworth, radiating the same disturbances as in old Peru; solemn Victorian orgies with roses falling and accordions floating to the strains of sacred music; professional

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imposters regurgitating moist cheesecloth; Mr. Duncan, a lady medium's dignified husband, who, when asked if he would submit to a search, excused himself on the ground of soiled underwear; old Alfred Russel Wallace, the naive naturalist, refusing to believe that the white form with bare feet and unperforated earlobes before him, at a private pandemonium in Boston, could be prim Miss Cook whom he had just seen asleep, in her curtained corner, all dressed in black, wearing laced up boots and earrings; two other investigators, small, puny, but reasonably intelligent and active men, closely clinging with arms and legs about Eusapia, a large plump elderly female reeking of garlic, who still managed to fool them; and Dingwall, the sceptical and embarrassed magician, instructed by charming young Margery's "control" not to get lost in the bathrobe's lining but to follow up the left stocking until he reached the bare thigh—upon the warm skin of which he felt a "teleplastic" mass that appeared to the touch uncommonly like cold uncooked liver.

7

I was appealing to flesh, and the corruption of flesh, to refute and defeat the possible persistence of discarnate life. Alas, these conjurations only enhanced my fear of Cynthia's phantom. Atavistic peace came with dawn, and when I slipped into sleep, the sun through the tawny window shades penetrated a dream that somehow was full of Cynthia.

This was disappointing. Secure in the fortress of daylight, I said to myself that I had expected more. She, a painter of glass-bright minutiae—and now so vague! I lay in bed, thinking my dream over and listening to the sparrows outside: Who knows, if recorded and then run backward, those bird sounds might not become human speech, voiced words, just as the latter become a twitter when reversed? I set myself to reread my dream—backward, diagonally, up, down—trying hard to unravel something Cynthia-like in it, something strange and suggestive that must be there.

I could isolate, consciously, little. Everything seemed blurred, yellow-clouded, yielding nothing tangible. Her inept acrostics, maudlin evasions, theopathies—every recollection formed ripples of mysterious meaning. Everything seemed yellowly blurred, illusive, lost.

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JOSE ORTEGA Y GASSET

Time, Distance, and Form in Proust

THIS TIME DEATH, in mowing down another's life, has in passing cut off our own pleasures.[1] Many people, in every country, had based their budget of future delights upon new books by Proust. This phenomenon of a public which "waits for" the next work of an author is extremely rare, and has been for some time. Certainly, there is no lack of worthy writers whom we receive in our libraries whenever they present themselves. But that we always receive their visit with politeness and respect does not mean that we desire it. For these gentlemen writing consists in forcing oneself to take positions or poses. With the most commendable constancy they subject us to their meager repertory of stereotyped life-studies. After a few unavailing performances we feel no urgent need to undergo the spectacle again.

But there are writers of another sort: those who have the luck or genius to have stumbled upon a vein of "things." Their situation is very similar to that of discoverers in science. With simplicity and a stupefying effortlessness they feel their foot gliding through a new region of aesthetic possibilities. If, using a vague and mystical term, we are accustomed to calling the first type of writers "creators," we shall have to call the second type "inventors" with everything that word signifies in its Latin root. For they have found the new and hidden fauna of an unknown countryside; at the very least, they have discovered a new way of seeing, a simple law of optics in which a certain unusual index of refraction is formulated. The status of such authors is much more assured: although their work is, in a sense, always the same, it promises us new things, fresh displays, and it is unlikely that eagerness to see them would be lacking in us. When Plato looks for a suitable classification by which to distinguish the philosophers, he fixes upon the class of *philotheamones*, or the friends of seeing, those who like to look. He thought perhaps that the most constant virtue in man is a certain visual enthusiasm.

Proust is one of these "inventors." In the midst of contemporary production, which is so capricious, so lacking in necessity, his work

[1] This essay first appeared in January 1923, two months after the death of Proust. At that time *La Prisonnière*, *La Fugitive*, and *Le Temps Retrouvé* had not yet appeared. (IS)

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presents itself with the stamp of something ordained. If it had never come into being, there would have remained, in the literary evolution of the nineteenth century, a specific gap with a clearly defined outline. One might even say, in order to point up its inevitability, that it was created a little late, that analysis would disclose a slight anachronism in its physiognomy.

The "inventions" of Proust are of prime importance because they deal with the most elemental ingredients of the literary object. Nothing less is involved than a new way of treating time and situating oneself in space.

But imagine that in order to give an idea of what Proust is we enumerated his themes to someone who had never read him—summer life in a familiar village; Swann's love; the emotional play of a boy and a girl with the Champs-Elysées as background; a summer on the coast of Normandy, in a deluxe hotel, before an unsettled sea on which glide the faces, with sea nymph features, of *jeunes filles en fleurs*, etc. If we gave an account of this sort, we would soon realize that we had said absolutely nothing and that these themes, which novelists have elaborated any number of times, cannot even suggest the character of what it is that Proust offers us. Some years ago a poor hunchback used to visit regularly the library of San Isidro. He was so short that he could scarcely reach the writing-desks. Invariably he would repair to the librarian on duty and ask for a dictionary. "Which one?" the employee would ask in a friendly manner. "Latin, French, English?" And the little hunchback would reply: "Look, it's all the same to me: I just want it to sit on."

We would make the same mistake as the librarian if we were to describe Claude Monet by saying that he painted the Cathedral of Notre-Dame and the Gare Saint-Lazare, or Degas by pointing out that he depicted laundresses, ballerinas, and jockeys. For both painters these subjects, which seem to be the theme of their paintings, are only the pretext: they painted these things just as they might have painted others of an entirely different sort. What they cared about, the real theme of their canvasses, is the aerial perspective, the gauze of chromatic vibrations in which things, whatever they may be, live sumptuously enclosed.

Something similar applies to Proust. The narrative themes that come and go on the surface of his work have only a tangential and secondary interest; they are like buoys adrift on the bottomless

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flood of his memories. Before Proust, writers had commonly taken memory as the material with which to reconstruct the past. Since the data of memory are incomplete and retain of the prior reality only an arbitrary extract, the traditional novelist fills them out with observations drawn from the present, together with chance hypotheses and conventional ideas. In other words, he unites fraudulent elements with the authentic materials of memory.

This method makes sense as long as the intention is, as it formerly was, to *restore* things of the past, i.e. to feign a new presence and actuality for them. The intention of Proust is the very opposite. He does not wish to use his memories as materials for reconstructing former realities; on the contrary, by using all conceivable methods —observations of the present, introspective analyses, psychological generalizations—he wants literally to reconstruct the very memories themselves. Thus, it is not things that are remembered, but the memory of things, which is the central theme of Proust. Here for the first time memory ceases to be treated as the means of describing other things and becomes itself the very thing described. For this reason Proust does not generally add to what is remembered those parts of reality which have eluded memory. Instead, he leaves memory intact, just as he finds it, objectively incomplete, occasionally mutilated and agitating in its spectral remoteness the truncated stumps that still remain to it. There is a very suggestive page in which Proust speaks of three trees on a ridge. He remembers that behind them there was something of great importance, something which has been effaced by time, abolished from memory. In vain the author struggles to recapture what has escaped him, to integrate it with that bit of decimated landscape—those three trees, sole survivors of the mental catastrophe which is forgetting.

The narrative themes in Proust are, then, mere pretexts and, as it were, *spiracula*, air-holes, tiny portals of the hive through which the winged and shuddering swarm of reminiscences succeed in liberating themselves. It is not for nothing that Proust gave his work the general title of *A la recherche du temps perdu*. Proust is an investigator of lost time as such. With utter scrupulousness he refuses to impose upon the past the anatomy of the present; he practices a rigorous non-intervention guided by an unshakable will to avoid reconstruction of any sort. From the nocturnal depths of the soul a memory surges upwards, excitingly, like a constellation in the night which ascends above the horizon. Proust represses all interest in restora-

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tion and limits himself to describing what he sees as it arises out of his memory. Instead of reconstructing lost time, he contents himself with making an edifice of its ruins. You might say that in Proust the genre of Memoirs attains the distinction of a pure literary method.

So much for his treatment of time. But even more elemental and stupefying is the nature of his invention with regard to space.

Various people have counted the number of pages that Proust employs in telling us that his grandmother is taking her temperature. Indeed, one cannot talk about Proust without noting his prolixity and concern for minutiae. In his case, prolixity and minute analysis cease to be literary vices and become two sources of inspiration, two muses that might well be added to the other nine. It is necessary for Proust to be prolix and minute for the simple reason that he gets much closer to objects than people are accustomed to. He is the inventor of a new distance between us and things. This fundamental revolution has had such tremendous consequences—as I have said—that almost all previous literature appears to be grossly panoramic, written from a bird's-eye point of view, as compared with the work of this delectably myopic genius.

By virtue of our animal adaptation to the world, each thing imposes a determinate distance upon us. Seen from this distance, it seems to us to attain its best appearance. The man who really wants to see a stone gets close enough to discern the porousness of its surface. But if he really wants to see a cathedral, he will have to give up seeing the pores of the stones. Instead, he will step back in order to enlarge his visual field considerably. The standard for each distance is set by the organic utilitarianism which governs all the activities of life. But perhaps it was an error for the poets to have thought that this system of distances, excellent as it is for vital necessities, was equally good for art. Proust, no doubt tired of always seeing a hand drawn as if it were a monument, brings it close to his eyes and, hiding the horizon behind it, finds to his great surprise that in the foreground of his vision there appears an intriguing landscape in which the valleys of the pores undulate surmounted by the lilliputian forest of the hairs. This, of course, is only a manner of speaking: Proust was not interested in hands, nor things of the body in general, but in more intimate flora and fauna. He corrects the distance between ourselves and our human feelings, and he breaks completely with the traditional way of describing them as if they were monuments.

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I think it would not be wholly amiss for us to investigate the matter a little further. We might then discover how this radical transformation of literary perspective originated in Proust.

When a primitive artist paints a vase or a tree, he starts with the assumption that everything really has an outline, that is to say, a definite contour or external form which, like a clearly marked frontier, separates it, isolates it, from all other things. To fix the outline of objects precisely, neatly, constitutes the major interest of the primitive. The impressionist, on the other hand, believes that this outline is illusory and not really given to us in actual vision. If we restrict ourselves to the tree as it is *seen*, in the most rigorous sense of the word, we shall discover that its outline is not clear-cut, that its silhouette is diffuse and imprecise, and that it is not distinguished from its surroundings by that non-existent contour but rather by the mass of chromatic tones interior to itself. For this reason, the impressionist does not *draw* the object; he attains it by accumulating tiny dabs of color, each one of which is formless in itself, but all of which together, in combination, are able to engender before half-closed eyes the vibrant presence of the object. The impressionist paints a vase or a tree without there being anything in his canvas that has the figure of a tree or a vase. As a pictorial style, then, impressionism consists in negating the external form of real objects in order to reproduce their internal form, the inner chromatic mass.

This kind of art dominated European sensibility at the turn of the century. And it is interesting to note the parallelism with the philosophy and psychology of the period. The philosophers of 1890 maintained that reality is made up of our emotive and sensory states. Whereas the ordinary man, like the primitive in painting, interprets the world as something definite and fixed that is to be found outside of ourselves, something endowed with magnificent, immutable architecture, the impressionist philosopher considers the universe a mere projection of our feelings and sensations, a flux of odors, tastes, lights, pains, and desires, a never-ending procession of unstable inward reverberations. Likewise, primitive psychology supposes that our personality consists of an invariable core, a kind of spiritual statue that receives the changes in the environment with a steady, unaltering countenance. Such is the psychology of the man of Plutarch whom we find immersed in the sea of life, enduring his hardships as a rock endures the howling surge or a statue the inclemencies of the weather. By contrast, the impressionist psy-

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chologist denies the existence of what is ordinarily called character, i.e. the sculptural outline of the individual. Instead, he sees the self as in perpetual mutation, a succession of diffuse states, an ever changing sequence of emotions, ideas, sorrows, hopes.

These considerations help us to date the essential tendencies of Proust. The monograph on Swann's love is an example of psychological pointillism. For the medieval author of *Tristan and Iseult* love is a sentiment that possesses a clear and definite outline of its own: for him, a primitive psychological novelist, love is love and nothing other than love. As opposed to this, Proust describes Swann's love as something that has nothing like the form of love. All kinds of things can be found in it: touches of flaming sensuality, purple pigments of distrust, browns of habitual life, grays of vital fatigue. The only thing *not* to be found is love. It comes out just as the figure in a tapestry does, by the intersection of various threads, no one of which contains the form of the figure. Without Proust there would have remained unwritten a literature that must be read in the way that the paintings of Monet are looked at, with the eyes half-shut.

It is for this reason that when Proust is compared to Stendhal one must proceed with caution. In many respects they represent two opposite poles, and are antagonistic one toward the other. Above all else, Stendhal is a man of imagination: he imagines the plots, the situations, and the characters. He copies nothing: everything in him resolves to fantasy, into clear and concentrated fantasy. His characters are as much "designed" as are the features of a madonna in the paintings of Raphael. Stendhal believes firmly in the reality of his characters and makes every effort to draw a sharp and unequivocal outline of them. The characters of Proust, on the other hand, have no silhouette; rather, they are changeable atmospheric condensations, spiritual cloud-formations that varying wind and light transform from one hour to the next. Certainly Proust belongs in the company of Stendhal, "investigator of the human heart." But while Stendhal takes the human heart as a solid with a definite though plastic shape, it is for Proust a diffuse and gaseous volume that varies from moment to moment with a kind of meteorological versatility. From the drawing of Stendhal to the painting of Proust there is the same distance as between Ingres and Renoir. Ingres has delineated beautiful women with whom one might fall in love. Not so Renoir; his method excludes the possibility. The living plasma of luminous

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points which is a Renoir woman may give us supremely the sensation of warm human flesh; but a woman, in order to be beautiful, must impose upon the mere expanse of her body the correct limit of a definite outline. Similarly, the literary and psychological method of Proust prevents him from modeling feminine figures of an attractive sort. Notwithstanding the predilection accorded her, the Duchesse de Guermantes seems to us ugly and self-assertive and nothing more. If, however, we were to enjoy anew the torrid years of our youth, it is certain that we would once again fall in love with la Sanseverina, that woman of so tranquil a face and so quivering a heart.

In short, Proust brings to literature what might be called a predominantly atmospheric purpose. The landscape and the characters, the inner world and the outer—everything has been volatilized into an aerial and diffuse palpitation. I would say that the world of Proust was made to be experienced like respiration, since everything in it flows like a current of air. In these volumes nobody does anything, nor does anything happen: there is just a passive succession of static situations. It could not have been otherwise: in order to do something, one must first be something definite. The action of an animal always develops like a line that originates by its own will and is reborn whenever impeded by obstacles, thereby revealing the existence of a self in opposition to intervening resistance. For this reason, the broken line that is the action of an animal —man or beast—is charged with a latent dynamism which lends dramatic impact to the very development of the action. The characters in Proust, however, belong to a vegetative order. For the plant, living is being, not doing. Submerged in the atmosphere and incapable of opposing itself to it, the plant's passivity eliminates the dramatic. Likewise, the characters of Proust have a botanical being, inert within their atmospheric destinies, their lives with vegetative submission reduced to a chlorophyllian function, a chemical dialogue always the same, quasi-anonymous and one in which the plant tractably receives the imperatives of its environment.

In these books, the real agents of human change are not the characters so much as the winds and climates, both physical and moral, which successively envelop them. The biography of each character is dominated by certain spiritual trade winds that alternately sweep against it and polarize its sensibility. Everything depends upon the direction from which the squall happens to blow;

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and just as there are freezing blasts and balmy currents, winds from the north and from the south, so too the Proustian character varies according as the gust of existence blows from the Côté de Méséglise or the Côté de Guermantes. There is nothing surprising in the frequency with which this writer speaks of "côtés" since, the world being a meteorological reality for him, he naturally thinks in terms of quadrants.

I suggest, then, that an inspired rejection of the external and conventional form of things forces Proust to define them by reference to their inner form, their internal structure. But this structure is of a microscopic sort, which explains why Proust had to get so abnormally close to things, and why he was led into poetic histology. More than anything else his work resembles those anatomical treatises that the Germans entitle, for example: *Uber feineren Bau der Retina des Kanninchens*, "On the microstructure of the retina of the rabbit."

Microscopic interest signifies an interest in details. An interest in details requires prolixity. The atmospheric interpretation of human life, and the minute analysis used in describing it, inevitably impose upon the works of Proust an attribute that might well appear to be a defect. I am referring to the peculiar fatigue that the reading of these volumes produces in even their most devoted admirers. If it were merely a question of the usual fatigue that feather-brained books secrete, there would be nothing more to say about it. But the fatigue that comes with reading Proust has very special characteristics and has nothing to do with boredom. With Proust we never get bored. It is very rare that even a single page should be lacking in adequate, indeed ample, intensity. Nevertheless, we are always ready, at any moment, to leave off the reading of Proust. Moreover, throughout the work we feel ourselves constantly halted, as if we were not allowed to advance at will, as if the rhythm of the author were always slower than our own, imposing a perpetual *ritardando* upon our haste.

Therein consists both the drawback and the advantage of impressionism: in the volumes of Proust, as I have said, nothing happens, there is no dramatic action, there is no process. They are composed of a series of pictures extremely rich in content, but static. We mortals, however, by our very nature, are dynamic; we are interested in nothing but movement.

When Proust tells us that the little bell jangles in the gateway of

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the garden in Combray and that one can hear the voice of Swann who has just arrived, our attention lights upon this event and gathering up its forces prepares to leap to another event which doubtless is going to follow and for which the first one is preparatory. We do not inertly install ourselves in the first event; once we have summarily understood it, we feel ourselves dispatched towards another one still to come. In life, we believe, each event announces its successor and is the point of transition towards it, and so on until a trajectory has been traced, just as one mathematical point succeeds another until a line has been formed. Proust ruthlessly ignores our dynamic nature. He constantly forces it to remain in the first event, sometimes for a hundred pages and more. Nothing follows the arrival of Swann; no other point links up with this one. On the contrary, the arrival of Swann in the garden, that simple momentary event, that point of reality, expands without progressing, stretches without changing into another, increases in volume and for page after page we do not depart from it: we only see it grow elastically, swell up with new details and new significance, enlarge like a soap-bubble embroidering itself with rainbows and images.

We experience, thus, a kind of torture in reading Proust. His art works upon our hunger for action, movement, progression as a continual restraint that holds us back; we suffer like the quail that, taking flight within his cage, strikes against the wire vault in which his prison terminates. The muse of Proust could well be called "Morosidad" (Sloth), his style consisting in the literary exploitation of that *delectatio morosa* which the Councils of the Church punished so severely.

We can now see with abundant clarity how the Proustian cycle of elemental "inventions" is structured. We can now see how his modification of ordinary distance and form is the natural consequence of his fundamental attitude towards memory. When memory is taken as one material among others for the intellectual reconstruction of reality, we only avail ourselves of that bit of remembering which we can use. Instead of allowing it to grow according to its own inherent principle, we move beyond. In reasoning and in simple association of ideas, our soul effects a trajectory, passes from one thing to another, our attention progressing by means of successive displacements. But if, turning our backs on reality, we throw ourselves into the contemplation of memory, we see that it

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proceeds by mere expansion without our having moved, so to speak, from the initial point. To remember is not, like reasoning, to travel through mental space: it is the spontaneous growth of space itself.

I do not know what actual techniques Proust used in writing. But his paragraphs, which make such complex and sinuous patterns, seem to have undergone internal vicissitudes after their first writing. One can see that perhaps they were originally well-proportioned, but that the memory enclosed within them has subsequently put forth protuberances, even excrescences, which form strange and—to my taste—delicious grammatical nodules similar to the bony humps that form in the feet of Chinese ladies due to the tightness of their shoes.

Having started with these remarks about the most elemental and abstract dimensions of the work of Proust, it would seem that the moment has now arrived to talk about the work itself and about the author's temperament. We would then discover quite surprising correlations between the anti-dynamic attitude which controls his interpretation of time, distance, and form, on the one hand, and the rest of what is peculiar to him, on the other. It is intriguing to observe that a single organic principle, in its formulation very simple, suffices for explaining all the aspects of Proust's work—for example, the extraordinary perspicacity with which he describes the events of sanguinary circulation in the narrator, his sharp perception of hygrometric changes and of muscular sensations; finally, his transcendent, all-embracing snobbery. But this would require too many pages . . . and a kind of literary criticism which perhaps interests no one but myself.

[*Translated from the Spanish by Irving Singer*]

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HUGH MACDIARMID

Island Funeral

The procession winds like a little snake
Between the walls of irregular grey stones
Piled carelessly on one another.
Sometimes, on this winding track,
The leaders are doubled back
Quite near us.

It is a grey world, sea and sky
Are colourless as the grey stones,
And the small fields are hidden by the walls
That fence them on every side.

Seen in perspective, the walls
Overlap each other
As far as the skyline on the hill,
Hiding every blade of grass between them,
So that all the island appears
One jumble of grey boulders.
The last grey wall outlined on the sky
Has the traceried effect
Of a hedge of thorns in winter.

The men in the stiff material
Of their homespun clothes
Look like figures cut from cardboard,
But shod in their rawhide rivelins
They walk with the springing step of mountaineers.
The women wear black shawls
And black or crimson skirts.

A line of tawny seaweed fringes the bay
Between high-water mark and low.

It is luminous between the grey of rocky shore
And the grey of sullen water.

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We can now and then look over a wall
Into some tiny field. Many of these
Are nothing but grey slabs of limestone,
Smooth as any pavement,
With a few blades of grass
Struggling up through the fissures,
And the grey surface of that rock
Catches and holds the light
As if it was water lying there.

At last the long line halts and breaks up,
And, like a stream flowing into a loch,
The crowd pours from the narrow lane
Into the cemetery where on an unfenced sandhill
The grey memorial stones of the island
Have no distinction from the country.
The coffin lies tilted a little sideways
On the dark grey sand flung up from the grave.

A little priest arrives; he has a long body and short legs
And wears bicycle clips on his trousers.
He stands at the head of the grave
And casts a narrow purple ribbon round his neck
And begins without delay to read the Latin prayers
As if they were a string of beads.
Twice the dead woman's son hands him a bottle

And twice he sprinkles the coffin and the grave
With holy water. In all the faces gathered round
There is a strange remoteness.
They are weather-beaten people with eyes grown clear,
Like the eyes of travellers and seamen,
From always watching far horizons.
But there is another legend written on these faces,
A shadow—or a light—of spiritual vision
That will seldom find full play
On the features of country folk
Or men of strenuous action.
Among these mourners there are unbelievers and believers
And many of them steer a middle course,

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Being now priest-ridden by convention
And pagan by conviction,
But not one of them betrays a sign
Of facile and self-lulling piety,
Nor can one see on any face
"A sure and certain hope
Of the Resurrection to eternal life."
This burial is just an act of nature,
A reassertion of the islanders' inborn certainty
That "in the midst of life we are in death."
It is unlike the appointed funerals of the mainland
With their bitter pageantry
And the ramp of undertakers and insurance companies
That makes death seem incredible and cruel.

There are no loafing onlookers.
Everyone is immediately concerned
In what is taking place.
All through their lives death has been very close to them
And this funeral of one who had been a "grand woman"
Seems to be but a reminder
Of the close comradeship between living and dying.

Down in the bay there is a row of curraghs
Drawn up on the sand. They lie keel upwards,
Each one shining black and smooth
Like some great monster of the sea,
Symbols to the island folk of their age-long
Battle with the waves, a battle where in daily life
The men face death and the women widowhood.

Four men fill in the grave with dark grey sand,
Then they cover the sand
With green sods and rough-hewn boulders,
And finally an old man with a yellow beard
Helps the four young grave diggers
In levering a great slab of stone
Until it lies flat upon the grave,
And the people watch all this in silence.
Then the crowd scatters east and west

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And, at last, the four grave-diggers,
All of them laughing now
With the merriment of clowns.

There are few and fewer people
On the island nowadays
And there are more ruins of old cottages
Than occupied homes.
I love to go into those little houses
And see and touch the pieces of furniture.
I know all there is to know
About their traditional plenishing
And native arts and crafts,
And can speak with authority
About tongue-and-groove cleats,
The lipped drawer, and the diameters of finials.
But I know them also in their origin
Which is the Gaelic way of life
And can speak with equal authority
About a people one of whose proverbs
Is the remarkable sentence:
"Every force evolves a form."

While this thing lasted
It was pure and very strong.
In an old island room the sense is still strong
Of being above and beyond the familiar,
The world as we know it,
In an atmosphere purified,
As it were, from the non-essentials of living
—An intangible feeling,
Difficult to describe,
But easy to recall to anyone
Who has stood in such a room
And been disturbed by the certainty
That those who once inhabited it
Were sure of every thought they had.

To enter almost any of the island rooms even to-day
Is to be profoundly conscious of this emanation,

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At once so soothing and so strangely agitating.
Fifty years ago a visitor wrote: "They are there to stay,
And that fact accounts for a great deal.
It is a reason for the repose and settledness
Which pervade an island village
—That indefinable something,
So altogether unlike the life of ordinary villages,
And which you feel in the air,
And are conscious of by some instinct, as men claim
To be aware of the presence of spirits.
There is no restlessness,
Or fret of business,
Or anxiety about anything.
It is as if the work was done,
And it was one eternal afternoon."
—But they have not, in fact, stayed,
Foully forced out and supplanted by their inferiors,
Red-faced merely-physical people
Whose only thought looking over
These incomparable landscapes
Is what sport they will yield
—How many deer and grouse.
The old stock are few and ever fewer now.
But they expected to stay,
And they deserved to stay,
Just as they expected there would always be
Thousands of them to work incessantly and serenely
At the making of objects which said:
"There is great beauty in harmony."

They lived as much like one another as possible,
And they kept as free as they could of the world at large.
It is not their creed as such, however,
That explains them and the beauty of their work.
It is rather the happiness with which they held it,
The light-heartedness with which they enslaved themselves
To the various rituals it demanded,
And also the circumstance that they were all
Poor people—whose notions of form
Were both ancient and basic.

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They began with the barest patterns, the purest beginnings
Of design, in their minds, and then
Something converted them into artists
With an exalted lyric gift.
What that something was
No one can claim perfectly to know.
Some of them were reported as believing
In assistance from the angels.
Whatever the source, the result was some
Of the most beautiful work the world has ever seen.

And even now, in any great city
I often move my ear up close
The better to distinguish in the raucous mixture
The sound of the cornet I want to hear,
And you may see my face light up
With recognition and appreciation at various points,
And hear me comment, "The greatest of them all."
The term is justified—this particular note,
This clear old island sound,
In the chaos of the modern world,
Is like a phrase from Beiderbecke's cornet,
As beautiful as any phrase can be.
It is, in its loveliness and perfection,
Unique, as a phrase should be;
And it is ultimately indescribable.
Panassié speaks of it as "full and powerful,"
But also as "so fine
As to be almost transparent,"
And there is in fact
This extraordinary delicacy in strength.
He speaks of phrases that soar;
And this, too, is in fact
A remarkable and distinguishable quality.

Otis Ferguson speaks of the "clear line
Of that music," of "every phrase
As fresh and glistening as creation itself,"
And there is in fact
This radiance, and simple joyousness.

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These terms tell a great deal, but there remains
Much that eludes words completely
And can only be heard.
And though one can account for the music
Up to a certain point by the quality of the person
—The "candour, force, personal soundness, good humour"—
There have been other people—and still are, no doubt—
With candour, force, personal soundness and good humour
And one has still to explain, as always,
How these qualities translated themselves
In this instance into such musical phrases.
In the din of our modern world
The island spirit plays merely
As an unfeatured member of well-known bands
—Which means that one hears it sometimes
For a full chorus, sometimes merely for a phrase,
Sometimes only in the background with the rest of the brass.
But even the phrase detaches itself from its surroundings
As something exquisite and perfect; and even playing
Along with the others in the background
It stands out from them,
Not through any aggressiveness but solely
Through the distinctive quality of its style.
"The greatest of them all"—but
There is little life left on the island now,
And soon the last funeral
Will take place there.
And in the rowdy chaos of the world
The sound of this cornet will be heard no more
—One will listen and one's face will never
Light up with recognition and appreciation again.

Yet if the nature of the mind is determined
By that of the body as I believe,
It follows that every type of human mind
Has existed an infinite number of times
And will do so. Materialism promises something
Hardly to be distinguished from the eternal life.
Minds or souls with the properties I love
—The minds or souls of these old islanders—

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Have existed during an eternal time in the past
And will exist for an eternal time in the future.
A time broken up of course
By enormous intervals of non-existence,
But an infinite time.
If one regards these personalities
As possessing some value
There is a certain satisfaction
In the thought that in eternity
They will be able to develop
In all possible environments
And to express themselves
In all the ways possible to them
—A logical deduction from thorough-going Materialism
And independent of the precise type
Of materialism developed.
It is quite unimportant whether we call
Our ultimate reality matter, electric charge,
Psi-waves, mind-stuff, neural stuff, or what not,
Provided it obeys laws which can, in principle,
Be formulated mathematically.

The cornet solo of our Gaelic islands
Will sound out every now and again
Through all eternity.

I have heard it and am content forever.

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HARVEY SWADOS

A Glance in the Mirror

WAITING FOR THE DOORS of the high school to open and his daughter to come running out, Roy Farrow was thinking about how stealthily spring had crept up on him. He had taken the usual precautions with the change of season—put his overcoat and tweeds in storage, brought the car in for tuneup and overhaul—and he had even noticed, as he drove alone, not stopping for hitchhikers, across New York State, Pennsylvania, and Ohio, that he could keep the windows down and that beyond the curbs in town after town the forsythias were turning to gold and the daffodils were blowing open, yellow and wet with spring rain on the lawns of all the old houses that drifted back away from him as he sped on to the place where he had been born forty years before.

But now that he was here he really felt it in his heart, which was where you really should feel spring if you were to know it at all. Lazily slouched like this in the open convertible with the warm wind in his hair and the strengthening sun on his hands lax across the steering wheel, he was uncertain whether the quickening in his chest could be charged to the weather, to this return to his birthplace, or to the fact that in a moment he would be seeing his only child for the first time in twelve years. Indeed, it might have been the intoxicating fragrance of the early spring breeze bellying through the riverward windows of his Manhattan apartment that had first filled him with an unease verging on disgust when he turned to observe Minerva, half-drunk in broad daylight at the piano, and drove him to consider how he might repossess himself by screwing up his courage to return home at last and identify himself to his daughter.

A quarter of a century earlier, at this very time of year, he had been jogging along the cinder track that girdled the cathedral-spired school, desperately trying to earn his letter; and for an instant now he was shaken with a comical yearning to re-experience that boyish agony, even if he had to turn up the cuffs of his doeskin slacks and trot his heart out just once more on the hot, half-forgotten cinders; but in five minutes the doors would open, and be-

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yond all this spring craziness was a painful desire to watch his daughter unobserved for a moment or two before he should walk up to her and take her by the hand.

He knew that he would recognize Kate at once from the snapshots that her mother sent him in response to the requests that sometimes accompanied his checks. Even without the pictures in his wallet, he would know her from a thousand other girls of her age, because of his ineradicable memory of how she had looked and felt as a three-year-old when he had hugged her goodbye, or maybe simply because of the special affinity of fathers for daughters, even for the daughters they left behind and came home to only after it was too late.

But then he thought: suppose she doesn't recognize me? What would he do if she were to stare at him blankly when he called out her name, and then turn away, as her mother must have taught her to do when strange men offered her candy or automobile rides? Roy wrenched about convulsively on the leather seat. Now he would probably have to pay the price for not having behaved sensibly, written ahead to Lisa that he was coming and then waited prudently at her house for Kate to come home from school. As he twisted about he caught a glimpse of his angry and ashamed face in the rear-view mirror.

He pulled down the mirror for a better look at himself in this final moment and stared coldly at the empty stranger's face. Bland and unlined, it had an aura of perennial youth that had been commercially useful in his trade but now struck him as almost hideous for a man of forty; and besides he knew, as few others did, that when he put on his reading glasses the pastiness of his complexion was accentuated and the large pores of his nose became perfectly noticeable. Beyond his broad pale forehead his platinum hair lay flat against his scalp like a smooth shining cap, just as it had done fifteen years before—no one but Minerva and his barber knew just how sparse it was getting. In five or six years he would be quite bald; already he could hear the wheedling words that his manager would use when he persuaded him to wear a hairpiece.

As he poked the mirror back into place, the school doors banged open and the walk before him became alive. First were the boys, cavorting, sniggering, elbowing, tossing balls back and forth, shouting. Then came the girls, moving more sedately than he would have thought possible, ruminant and bovine, and all wearing what

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looked like outlandish castoff skirts of their mothers, voluminous and almost dragging the ground, barely high enough to reveal the thick shapeless white wool socks that were folded double over their ankles. But there were so many of them!

Roy was suddenly panicked. Supposing he were to miss her? He would have to drive to Lisa's and hang around, like a rent collector or a man come to fix the faucet, in that house he had been dreading to visit. He jumped out and made his way through the pack of yelling boys to the girls strolling with linked hands and schoolbooks cradled in their arms like babies. Where was she?

When he heard someone calling, "Father! Father!" in a high clear voice, he could not at first believe that it was meant for him. He was taken by the arm, then, and half turned around by a tall thin girl who came up to his eyes. "Don't you recognize me? I'm Kate!"

He felt himself flushing. He had to speak loudly to make himself heard. "I didn't think *you'd* recognize *me* . . . Say, can't we get out of here?"

But it was too late already. He and Kate were surrounded by a growing circle of boys and girls who shoved at each other with happy ferocity, poking pencils at him for his autograph and chanting his name as though it were an incantation; he had to strain his ears to hear Kate, who clung fiercely to his arm, her eyes burning with pride and devotion. "You're so modest! *Anybody* would recognize you, even if you weren't their father! And I'm so glad you're here! I knew it, I always knew you'd come!"

Yes, she was glad—but was this what he had wanted? With their arms twined awkwardly around each other's shoulders, they moved slowly away from the school and down to his sloping convertible, which looked out of place and affected here. More students had gathered admiringly around the car and were waiting to be introduced by Kate. For one self-hating moment he wondered whether this cheap and easy hero worship had been his real reason for coming unannounced to pick up his daughter. And even if he hadn't, why else was *Kate* so delighted to see the father who hadn't even bothered to visit her in a dozen years?

At the curb some of the noisy crowd fell back to make way for a tall stout man who came forward with his arm outstretched and a hearty smile pasted on his florid face. "This is Mr. Klass," Kate said. "He's our vice principal."

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"Delighted to meet you at last, Mr. Farrow." He squeezed Roy's hand fiercely. He was as bulky and self-assured as a football coach. "It's always a pleasure to greet an outstanding alumnus. May I ask if you expect to be in town long? We'd be honored to have you address our assembly next Wednesday morning."

"That's very kind of you. But I'm just here for a very short visit with my daughter. I'm sure you understand."

The vice principal was swallowed up in the press of his students before he could reply. Roy opened the door for Kate and then slipped behind the wheel himself. "Why don't we meet your gang someplace?" he asked.

She said a little timidly, "Would you mind going to the ice cream parlor? That's where everybody hangs out."

It was only four blocks away. Kate's hair, as fine as her mother's, was blowing against his face, and as he reached down to shift into high his hand brushed her thigh, thin and not yet fully developed; but he could not see her face without squinting out of the corner of his eye, and indeed he was beginning to wonder if he would be able to look at her directly at all during the afternoon.

But when they were settled in a booth at the soda parlor, Roy found himself seated near the wall across from his daughter, with only two of her friends to keep them company. He glanced at the record selector at his elbow; four of the fifteen records listed were his. Guiltily he turned back to the glowing face of his daughter, as one of the girls leaned across him to insert a nickel.

"You don't have to pick one of mine just because I'm here, Sally," he said to the girl.

"What do you mean?" she said gruffly. "Roy Farrow and the Music of Tomorrow? We hardly ever play anything else, except for singers. You're our favorite."

Kate added excitedly, "She's not just saying that because you're my father, either. Even our music appreciation teacher had to admit that your band plays wonderful arrangements and that people are starting to play string instruments again on account of you."

"But you don't play a string instrument, do you?"

"Didn't mother write you? I'm taking the cello from Mr. Poggi. I know you don't use cellos in your orchestra, but ever since I heard Gregor Piatigorsky play the Dvorak Cello Concerto I've been crazy about it." She went on, somewhat defensively, "Some of the kids think it's not graceful for a girl."

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"That's silly." He had to speak loudly, over his own music—it was *Atomic Cloud*. Why hadn't he ever realized before that it was not just unbalanced in the rhythm section, but that the whole idea of it was pretentious and phoney? "When people say things like that, it's generally because they're envious."

"They've got reason to be envious of *me*."

For one horrible moment he was sure that his daughter was being sarcastic. But he looked into her sparkling eyes, smiling gratefully and frankly above her ice cream soda, and he was ashamed. So she was proud of him. Well, when you were fifteen it was easier to be proud of someone you didn't know than of someone you knew.

But how could he get to know her here, any more than in his apartment on 76th Street, or in the recording studio, or in any of the hotels where he worked? All that he could learn here, as he chatted pleasantly with her friends about his band, about what *Down Beat* had said, about what they liked to hear best, was her facial expression and her public manner. He liked her thinness, her wide eyes, her tension; and behind the school-girl flutter he could sense already a coolness, a self-possession that could only grow stronger as she matured. "It must be a little sleepy here after all the excitement you've been used to," she said, smiling, and it seemed to him that if he had waited another year, or perhaps two, before seeing her, she would have been not merely smiling, but mocking.

Since it was impossible to get any closer to her, Roy resolved to be simply amiable. The afternoon passed pleasantly, and when he had paid the waitress for all of Kate's crowd, she turned to him and said, "You were a peach." Startled, he turned sideways and stared at her. "Kate . . . What do you mean?"

"All the kids thought you were swell, not stuck up or acting like a famous person or even like a father. I could tell."

He took her firmly by her thin elbow and led her out to the car, waving his goodbyes to her friends who still remained in the soda parlor.

Now, he thought, we are alone. They settled down in the car and drove off slowly.

"I guess . . . " she hesitated, " . . . you know the way to the house."

"I certainly do," he replied, a shade too grimly.

"Father."

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It still made him shiver to hear the word. "Yes."

"Why did you wait so long to come back?"

Was it the uninhibited tactlessness of children that was so endearing, so ruthless that it became a kind of tactfulness of which adults were incapable—or was it simply that he would have expected, instead of this question, the more brutal query: *Why did you come back at all? Why did you come back now?*

"When I first left . . . " he hesitated, stopped, and then began again, "At the time your mother and I were divorced, we were very angry at each other. We—hated each other. It lasted for quite a long time, with me anyway. Then of course there was the war, and I was in England. And after that I was very busy getting reestablished."

"But in the last few years—"

Roy did not look at her. "By that time it seemed wiser to stay away and let you and your mother continue with your own lives. I *am* a stranger, you know, even if we do write to each other. And besides," he concluded lightly, "maybe I was a little afraid to come back."

"That's funny. That's what mother said once, but when I asked her what she meant . . . she said she was just being nasty, and she really didn't mean it."

Oh, she meant it, all right, he thought bitterly. For an instant he could taste the old hatred on his tongue, rank and salty as his own sweat. You could forget hatred, thank God, just as you forgot pain and grief and even ecstasy; but suddenly you could get a flash of the old memory, like an anginal cramp bringing you stabbingly face to face with eternity. Christ, how he had hated her! Within two years after their marriage, she had repudiated everything he had naively thought that they both believed in, she had mocked at his dreams of becoming a composer, she had whined and wheedled at him for things that he did not want or even know how to provide. And how she must have hated him! Ambitious and determined, it must have galled her to see her friends go off to New York, to Chicago, to Hollywood, to *go*, even if they did not become rich or famous, while she rotted away in the town where she had been brought up, in the very house where she had been born—and simply because her husband was content to give piano lessons at a dollar an hour and daydream at home of writing the kind of music he had studied with her at the conservatory, when she knew in her heart

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and soul that he could never do it and would only succeed in reducing her prospect to an endless vista of small-town drudgery.

Was that what had been in the back of his mind when he decided to drive out to visit Kate? Was he really so mean that he had only wanted to rub it in, to park his white Jaguar in front of Lisa's house, to cross his legs in her parlor and display his seven-dollar argyles and sixty-dollar shoes to her burningly envious gaze?

He said to his daughter, "I've been very lonesome, Kate. This seemed like a good time for me to come out and get to know you," and even as he was speaking he knew that he was being something less than completely honest. "If I *was* afraid, it was only of how you'd feel about seeing me." He added winningly, "You know what I mean."

"Yes I do." She spoke gravely, staring down at her hands that lay folded in her lap. "But you shouldn't ever have worried about that. I knew how it was with you and mother, and that you've had your own life to lead."

"You don't think I've been selfish."

"Oh no!"

It was strange how you could go on, always believing you were better than people thought you were, reassuring yourself, protecting yourself against the smirks of the columnists and the gibes of the envious by reminding yourself of your secret kindliness and measuring your own sensitivity against the callousness of others; then suddenly it was turned topsy turvy when a girl, your own daughter, told you that you were better then you were, or seemed to be, and you knew in your own heart that she was wrong.

What was right? What was fair? Was it better to stay away—or to go away, now that he was here—and leave Kate with her childish illusions untarnished—or should he assume the responsibilities of a father even to the point of trying to open her eyes to the truth about him? No one could answer such a question for you, not your agent or your manager or your current girl friend or your best drinking pal.

He tightened his lips and turned into the block of elm-shaded bungalows where fathers were walking home to dinner down the cracked old concrete sidewalks and their children were coasting slowly alongside them on box scooters; they turned their heads to stare at his car as he brought it to a stop in front of Lisa's house.

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"I'll just drop you here, Kate, he said. "You can tell your mother that I'll come by after dinner, if she won't mind."

Kate stopped dead, her hand frozen on the door handle. He was not sure in that instant whether she was bewildered or angry. Her eyebrows came together in a frown and she said in a pained voice, "Do you mean you don't want to see her at all? Do you want her to be away when you come back, is that it?"

"No, no," he replied agitatedly, "it's just that it's almost supper time and I don't—" but he had to stop because it was obvious that the only way he could prove to her that her father was not a coward after all was to walk up the weathered grey wooden steps of the porch with her and spin the rusting iron bell in the middle of the front door. "Come on," he said gruffly, "let's go."

But of course Kate would not let him stand formally on the porch of her house, waiting for her mother to answer the bell. Roy had time only to notice that the house needed painting and that the metal glider, still standing where it had a dozen years ago, was mottled with rust spots, before he was pulled into the dim front hall and then into the parlor, with Kate shouting, "Mother, mother, see who I brought home with me!"

Lisa came out from the kitchen, wiping her hands on her apron. The light was behind her as she advanced, and his first thought was that she had not put on any weight at all. Her figure was slim and fine, just as it had been when they were first married; but then she turned her head in response to a kitchen noise, cocking it a little, like a pretty canary in a cage, just as she used to do when he played something for her that he had just composed, and he saw that she was middle-aged.

Although he had been creating mental images of what Lisa would look like for some time now, her actual appearance was a revelation to him—while she, who was utterly unprepared for this occasion, looked at him almost serenely now, her shock betrayed only by a quick intake of breath and by a widening and darkening of her pupils that became apparent as she moved toward him through the twilit dining room and the waning light struck her face.

Her nose seemed sharper than he remembered, and as her nostrils dilated and her chest rose in a shuddering sigh, two grooves that he did not remember appeared on either side of her nose and mouth; her neck, that had been arched and swanlike in her girl-

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hood, was beginning to sag under the chin. Roy felt sick with anguish and pity, both for Lisa and for himself—he was staring, he knew, at the wreckage of his youth—and yet it seemed to him that, simply because she carried the stigmata more obviously, she bore the encroachments of approaching middle age more gracefully than he.

"Hello, Roy," she said. "This is quite a surprise. How are you?"

"Just fine. You're looking very well, Lisa." He was tempted to add, *You're starting to look like the librarians and the schoolteachers and the spinsters that you used to point out in such terror when you pleaded with me to get up some gumption and get you out of this town;* but there was no bitterness in her face now, and if the resignation that he saw in it was like what she had seen in the faces of older townswomen when she was a girl, it could only be wanton cruelty to point it out to her now.

"You'll stay for dinner."

"Oh, no, I'll drop back later. I picked Katie up at school and we spent the afternoon together, so I drove her home. But I wouldn't dream of popping in on you like this at supper time."

"Nonsense. You don't have to be formal. We're having chicken —I can always fish out an extra wing for you."

They sat in the kitchen—Roy would have preferred the somewhat less chummy formality of the dining room, if only because the dimensions of the round oak table would have kept him further away from Lisa—and chatted about Kate: her ice skating, her cello instructor, her girl friends, her school marks, the clothing that she was outgrowing. And all through the meal, even afterward, while Kate washed, he wiped, and Lisa put things away, he waited tensely for the questions about himself that would betray her real feelings, the emotions she had never dared to reveal in all her years of businesslike letters.

When they had finished with the last of the dessert dishes (the meal had been substantial and filling, if not particularly tasty, and when he complimented Lisa on it she had smiled, a little grimly, he thought) Lisa glanced about vaguely, rubbed her hands on her apron with seeming nervousness as she folded it and put it down, and said, "Roy . . . "

He tensed and closed the lighter that he had been about to touch to his cigarette. "Yes?"

"I don't think we've had the chance to write you that Kate has

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been accepted as a junior counselor at the YW camp, you know, out on the lakeshore. Isn't that fine?"

Kate was standing in the doorway, looking at him eagerly. "Say," he said, "that's perfectly swell. Have you got your life-saving certificate, Katie?"

"They wouldn't have taken me otherwise. I wrote you last year when I got it, don't you remember?"

"It comes back to me now."

"Your father has more on his mind than your life-saving tests, Katie."

Roy glanced sharply at Lisa as they walked into the parlor, but her face was perfectly serene. She means it, he thought to himself in wonder, she really means it.

Seated in the parlor on the same sofa on which he had once held his wife on his knees, he leaned back and gazed first at the framed portraits of her long-dead parents staring mildly and eternally back at him from the mantelpiece, and then at Lisa herself, curled up on the slipcovered wing chair across the room from him with her feet tucked beneath her. She looked back at him equably, passed her hand over her hair, and reached for the knitting bag which lay beside her on the rug.

"Kate," she said, "you ought to go upstairs and get cleaned up. It's almost time for your club meeting."

"Oh mother! Not tonight!" Kate had flung herself down on the floor at his feet and leaned back against the couch with her head just under his hand. "This is a special occasion. I don't want to go anyplace while father is here."

Roy ran his fingertips lightly over her pale hair. "I'd rather you stayed home too, Kate. But your mother and I might have a few things to talk over alone together." Her head stirred restlessly under his hand.

Lisa too shifted about uncomfortably; it was almost as if she hadn't expected, or wanted, to be alone with him. But she said, "It's up to you if you want to skip the meeting. But you have to do your homework anyway. Go up to your room and do your Latin and your geometry while your father and I talk, and you can come down as soon as you've finished."

"All . . . right . . . " Kate arose lingeringly and drifted from the room, waving farewell at the foot of the stairs. "I'll be down soon, father."

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The silence, after she had gone upstairs, was unpleasantly heavy —for both of them, it seemed, since they both began to talk at once.

Lisa said, "Kate doesn't often—"

And he said, "It seemed to me—"

Lisa laughed. "I'm sorry. Go ahead."

Was she determined to speak of nothing but Kate? He couldn't let her get away with it, even if Kate was the obvious reason for his being here. He was oppressed suddenly by a peculiar sense of frustration, as if he had gotten here only to find that his daughter had already gone away on vacation.

"I suppose it all seems pretty ironical to you," he said.

"What does, Roy?" she asked calmly.

"Why . . . my coming out like this . . . fancy car, fancy clothes, after all these years. It's just what you always wanted for me."

"Of course I did."

There was neither bitterness nor resentment in her voice; yet perhaps she was giving him the needle in a peculiarly subtle way, against which he had no defense.

"It's what you always wanted for yourself too," he went on stubbornly.

At last her smile seemed to turn a little sour. "Not always," she corrected him. "Only when you knew me. I mean, when we were married."

He looked at her incredulously. "And after I left, you changed?"

"Not exactly. But my life became all Kate, a hundred per cent. Then when time went by I sort of resigned myself to staying here. I knew you weren't having such an easy time of it either, so I really didn't hate you. And besides, I knew the day would come when you'd really make it." She added firmly, "That I always knew."

He leaned forward and said, with a kind of feeble desperation, "But Lisa, you *knew* how I hated the idea. You *knew* what I actually wanted out of life."

Her smile became almost malicious. She glanced down at her knitting. "But then you changed, too, didn't you, after you left? You must have. And I knew you would, because sooner or later you'd have to realize what was right for you. I always told you, you had the voice for it, and the figure, and you had the personality too. And now when I turn on the TV and watch you every Saturday, it's just as though all of those old dreams have come true."

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Dreams come true . . . Good God, he thought, she can be cruel . . . or does she listen to soap operas all day, while she reads about me in the gossip columns and waits to see me at night on the screen? He got to his feet angrily, and in his clumsiness almost knocked over the floor lamp at his elbow.

"What is it, Roy?" Lisa asked. "Is something wrong?"

"Don't you remember the fights at all any more? Don't you remember how I used to swear that I'd never get caught in the success trap?"

"You were young then. We both were. But every time I hear you on the radio, or see you on TV, I know that I was justified in predicting what I did." She hesitated. "I'm very proud of you, Roy, even though we couldn't stick it out together. Kate is too—you can see that without my telling you. In fact the whole community is. People stop me on the street."

There came to his mind then, as he stood nervously picking at the fringe of the lamp, a conversation he had had not long ago with Minerva, with whom he had been living off and on ever since the war. "You don't even understand," she had said, "why that poor woman still keeps your name." "No," he had muttered, "unless it's to get even with me in some way." "Nonsense. It makes her a big shot in town, that's all. She probably still thinks you're wonderful." She smiled crookedly. "Just like I do."

He said in a choked voice, "You don't dislike me then, Lisa. You don't hold anything against me?"

She shook her head slowly. "Not any more. I used to, but not any more. Things worked out the way they had to. I'm glad for you, too."

"Thank you." It was impossible now to tell her any of the things he had been burning to: to throw up his success to her, to say, I hate it just as I told you I would, it's phoney and I'm a failure and I hope you're satisfied, I did what you wanted and now I have to worry about my hair and my arranger and my singer's sex life and my doctored state income tax returns. Certainly he did not dare to tell her that in the dark moments of the night he despised himself and his white Jaguar, and shrank with terror from the thought of what lay in wait when his temporary popularity had run its course. It was too late, it was far too late for him ever to accomplish any of the things he had dreamed of doing ten and fifteen years earlier,

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and all he could look forward to was cushioning the bruising impact of this desolate realization with as much material comfort and financial security as he could finagle.

"I read in the paper," Lisa said shyly, "that you're making a movie."

"Yes," he murmured, "they're going to shoot it in New York, mostly." In all honesty he would have added—if it had not been for the light in her eyes—that he would not clear a dime on the picture after paying off the band and his back taxes and that his only reason for engaging in the idiocies that the script called for was to keep his name before the adolescents who went to the movies. He looked up at her from the lamp fringe that he had been twirling around his finger and said lightly, "It should be fun."

"I'll bet. We'll be watching for it—you have no idea how much your career means to us in this town."

She was nourished by it, and Katie was too—that was what she was trying to say. Who was he to deprive her? He put his hand to the knot of the Sulka tie that Minerva had given him and said, "The movie may not be in the can until fall or winter. I don't suppose you know that the boys and I are booked into the Palladium in London next month."

"London!" Her eyes widened.

"As soon as the agency gets a summer replacement for the TV show. So that—" he stopped at the sound of Kate's footsteps. She walked swiftly to his side and turned to face her mother.

"I did my Latin, it was easy, and I can do my geometry during study period tomorrow. Can't I stay here with father now?"

"I was just telling your mother," Roy said, slipping his arm around her waist, "that I'm going to have to leave for London very soon. We've got an engagement there."

"How are you going to go? Are you going by jet?"

He laughed. "Oh, sure. I wouldn't want to disappoint you. And I'll send you a cashmere cardigan sweater. Would you like that?"

Her eyes were like her mother's. Glowing brilliantly, they seemed to be pleading with him never to falter, never to allow his dream image to become tarnished. He released his hold on her waist and stepped back so as to be able to look at Kate and her mother at once. They gazed back at him with that same compound of arrogant possession and humble abasement that he had seen so often

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in the eyes of his adolescent audiences. Was he playing up to that look now because he had become so completely an article of commerce that he was incapable of any other response? What else could he do but respond with a false and hearty smile?

"If I manage to get to Paris," he heard himself saying with great calmness, "even if it's only for a day, I'll get you both some perfume. I think I know what kinds you like."

"Now, Roy," Lisa said, "don't go spoiling Kate."

"Tell you what. You keep tabs on her and let me know if she really deserves it. Okay?" He winked at Kate. "And now I have to be getting along."

"Why don't you stay here, father? We've got a spare room."

Lisa arose and dropped her knitting behind her in the chair. "*If your father prefers, honey, he can come back first thing in the* morning and have breakfast with us."

Roy found himself biting at the nail of his little finger. "I'm afraid I haven't made myself clear. You see, I really won't be able to come back in the morning, or to see you again for quite a while."

The two stared at him in consternation. For one terrible second he thought that one of them—it might be either, the way they both gazed at him with their soft mouths slightly open—would accuse him of running away, just as Kate had suspected him of cowardice when he had brought her home.

He heard himself saying, swiftly but smoothly, "I simply have to be in Chicago and Cleveland before I get back to New York for my show. As it is, I'm going to have to drive all night." It was a poor lie, but as the hurt faded from their eyes and was replaced by awe and pride, he went on, "I purposely went out of my way to stop here—figured I've been feeling guilty long enough about not seeing you. Besides, I wanted to ask you, Lisa, if you'd give Kate permission to come and visit me later this summer—after I get back from England, that is."

He couldn't even remember now, looking into his daughter's glowing eyes in the moment before she flung herself on him and began to hug him, whether he had intended to ask this of Lisa before he got here. But, smiling at her over the top of Kate's head, he had the impression that she was pleased, almost as pleased as her daughter, but that she would not let her go to New York alone. Next year, perhaps.

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The goodbyes were a little prolonged. Kate and Lisa walked him out to the car (it struck him as fortunate that they had no way of telling from the car or from his one valise how long he had intended to stay) and stood at the curb with their arms around each other in the moonlight, like a couple of schoolgirls. In the hushed spring moment of rural silence before he gunned the roaring motor and flipped the gearshift into first, it was borne upon Roy that his former wife and his daughter were clinging to each other protectively, shielding each other from the desolation of his departure, perhaps, or merely from what the incalculable future could bring them, as today it had brought them this unforseen visit. They would talk about the visit for a long while, probably, but in the end there would be other things, more important things, from which to protect each other.

Then he was off, floating like a moth through the green and black avenues of the town in which he had been born, passing the hospital where he had had his tonsils out and where his wife, after severe travail, had been delivered of his daughter, and he wondered fleetingly whether either of them would ever accuse him—not to his face, but to each other—of having come only to preen himself for one pathetic hour. It was not likely; they lived a little too meanly, though, all things considered; I will have to ask Archie, he thought, if I can't hike Lisa's checks just a little. When he reached the state highway heading east, his foot came down lightly and the automobile leaped forward easily at seventy miles an hour. He leaned back snugly in the bucket seat that cradled him as the tires sang beneath him, and while he listened to the song of the humming rubber in the dark of the night, he began to compose in his mind for Minerva (who was bound to consider the episode as faintly ridiculous) a defense of what he had done, of what he had not done —as if in the end there could ever be any defense of what you had made of your life.

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S. P. BOVIE

Translations from Horace

SATIRE I, 1 (*Qui fit, Maecenas, ut nemo, quam sibi sortem*)

Why is it, Maecenas, that no one is ever quite happy
With the life he has chosen or stumbled upon, and never
Abides by it happily, but loves to praise instead
All who do something else? "Now, take businessmen:
They're really well off," says an old army man, weighed down
By years of service, his frame bruised and blunted with work.
But the businessman says, as he rides out a perilous squall
On his ship, "The army's the thing. And why? Well, look:
There's a fight, and in no time at all you've got your results.
You win or you lose—death or success—and it's over!"
The man versed in legal procedure, waked up at dawn
When a client raps at his door, envies the farmer,
While the latter, dragged into town to appear in a case,
Loudly admires the life city-dwellers lead.
And so it goes. To rehearse the string of examples
Would tire even garrulous Fabius. Not to detain you,
Here's how I see it. Suppose some god were to say:
"I shall grant whatever you wish. You, now a soldier—
Be a businessman. You, now a lawyer, are free to become
The rural type. You've changed your roles: you can *go* now,
And you two, too. Well! What are you waiting for?" Naturally,
When they could be happy, they wouldn't take the chance.
Isn't this why Jove quite rightly might puff out both cheeks
And declare that in future he will not again lend so easy
An ear to their prayers?
I shouldn't make fun of the subject,
And yet—there's no law against telling the truth with a smile.
Smart teachers, for instance, give crunchy sweets to children
To make them learn their letters. But joking aside,
Let's continue.
The man who turns the heavy earth
With his unyielding plow, or the rascally sharp innkeeper,
Or the soldier, or undaunted sailors who set out across

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Any old sea, all say they put up with such work
To retire safe and sure in old age when they've scraped up enough
To subsist on: just as their model, the miniature ant
Who works like a giant—drags up whatever he can
In his mouth to add to the heap he is busily building,
By no means unconscious of or out of touch with the future.
The ant, when watery winter has turned the year round,
No longer creeps out, but wisely makes use of supplies
Laid by months before. But nothing will stand in your way,
Not blistering summer, not winter, not fire, flood or sword,
So long as someone remains even richer than you.
Just what is the good of your furtively fearfully digging
A hole in the ground for a great weight of silver and gold?
"Well, if I touch it, the sum dwindles right down to nothing."
But if you don't use it what charm adheres to the pile
You've constructed? You've threshed a hundred thousand bushels
Of wheat, but your stomach accommodates no more than mine.
Just as, if you among other slaves carried a basket
Of bread on your bowed shoulders, you would receive the same rations
As the man with no load. Tell me, if you please, what's the difference
To the man who knows how to live within nature's true limits,
Between plowing a good hundred acres and plowing a thousand?
"Well, it's nice to draw from a big pile." But you're perfectly willing
To permit us to draw exactly as much from our small pile,
So why do you praise your silos above our grain-boxes?
It's as if you needed a jar, or a cupful, of water
And said, "I'd much rather drink from a great big river
Than draw the same amount from this trickling spring."
And so it happens that those who delight in having
A more than moderate share the flood-raging Aufidus
Sweeps away with its crumbling bank, but he
Who wants only what he needs, neither drinks water
Churned up with mud nor loses his life in the waves.
  Mankind for the most part, fooled by its own false desires,
Says, "There's no such thing as enough. You are worth
Only as much as you have." And what can you do
With a person like this? Oh, well! Wish him Hell and farewell,
Since he's headed that way by choice. Like the man they tell of

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In Athens, filthy, but rich, who despised the voice
Of the people and kept saying, "So! The citizens hiss at me!
Ah! But I applaud myself alone at home
When I gaze on the coins in my strongbox." Thirsty Tantalus
Makes for the water that always recedes from his lips.
You laugh? Well, just change the name and you'll find that this story,
As a matter of fact, means YOU. You sleep on the sacks
Of money you've scraped up and raked in from everywhere,
And, gazing with greed, are still forced to keep your hands off
As if they were sacred or simply pictures to look at.
Don't you know what money is for, or just how to use it?
It's to buy bread and greens, and a pint of wine,
And the things that we, being human, can't do without.
Would you rather stand guard, half-dead with fright, and tremble
Day and night over sneak thieves, fire, or slaves
Running off with your loot? If this craven type seems to lead
The more abundant life, I prefer to be poor.
And suppose your body begins to ache, when malaria
Offers her chilly touch, or that some other mishap
Pins you in bed. Have you someone to sit by your side
And fix you warm lotions, call the doctor in to fix you,
And hand you back to your children and precious relations?
The truth is that neither your wife nor your son wants you back:
Your neighbors and "friends," man, woman and child, all despise you.
Are you so amazed, who have always put money first,
That no one extends you the love you have not tried to earn?
Or do you feel that to try and hold on to your family,
To make friends of those whom nature has given you gratis,
Would be just a waste of time and effort, like trying
To teach a donkey to run on the Campus like a racehorse,
And respond to the reins?
Let your grasping for money cease, now
That you have so much more and should fear want so much the less.
You've got what you craved: begin to end up your work.
So that you don't end up as Ummidius did. It's not a long story.
So rich he had to measure, not count, his money,
So stingy he never dressed better than a slave, he still feared
Right up to the end, that poverty might overtake him.

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His freedwoman, actually, the brave Clytemnestra type,
Divided him squarely in two with an axe. "And so,
What would you persuade me to do? Live like Nomentanus
Or Naevius?" But you insist on pairing off things
That are opposites, like gladiators! I say don't be close, I don't say
Be a sap or a cloudbrain. There is still room for us in between
Visellius' all-balled-up father-in-law and Tanais,
The eunuch. There's a moderate measure in things, there are limits
Which sensible conduct should neither exceed nor fall short of.
And now I return to my first point, that no greedy person
Ever approves of what he is doing, but likes
To praise those who do something else. For instance, he turns green
If another man's goat gives more milk. He fails to compare
Himself with the throng of people poorer than he is,
He strains to outdo first this man then that one. Someone richer
Always stands in the way of his drive, as the charioteer
Lashes his horses on after the chariots in front of him,
When they're off at a hoof-thudding pace with a lunge from the starting line,
And forgets about those also running behind him. So it is
That you rarely find someone who admits to having been happy
With the time allotted him, who admits that he has lived well,
And lived right, and is ready to leave, like one who gets up
From a banquet.
This is all: I won't add a word, for fear
You will think I've ransacked the lecture material and notes
That Crispinus Conjunctivitis keeps in his file.

Satire I, 2 (*Ambubaiarum collegia, pharmacopolae*)

The Syrian Society of Fastidious Feminine Flutists
And Dancers, the Neighborhood Druggists, the Mendicant Priests
Organized for Cybele, Strip-Teasers United, the Pitchmen—
Everyone of this sort is quite downhearted and worried
By the death of Tigellius (a singer, not a dessert).
He was so open-handed! The opposite type of person,
Afraid to be labeled a liberal, begrudges the little
He might give a friend to help ward off cold and starvation.

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If you ask still another, a spendthrift, why he runs through
His father's and grandfather's fine estate to appease
His insatiable appetite, buying all sorts of rare foodstuffs
And borrowing money to do it, he answers you back
That he never would wish to be thought of as mean or stingy.
For this he is praised by some and blamed by others.
Fufidius, rolling in real estate, lush with the loans
He has out at interest, worries for fear he'll be labeled
Either a pushover or a dimwit, so when he lends money
He deducts from the principal five times the usual interest.
And the direr the borrower's straits, the higher the price.
He hunts up accounts among young men just come of age
Whose fathers have budgeted them strictly. "My God, what a tightwad!"
Everyone says who hears about this, "But he spends
Heavily on himself, with that income?" Oh, no! You wouldn't
Believe how hard a man like Fufidius can be
On himself: the father described in Terence's play
Who forced his son to leave home, and so lived unhappily
Ever after, didn't treat himself worse than does our hero.
But if someone now asks, "Just what is your point?" I reply:
Fools, in avoiding one vice, run into its opposite.
Malthinus ambles along with his tunic at half-mast:
Another stalks by with it drawn right up to his censored.
Rufillus reeks of pastilles, Gargonius of he-goats.
There seem to be no middle courses, but only extremes.
Some men won't go near a woman unless she's married;
Another will only go on when the light is red.
When a certain notorious fellow was seen coming out
From a certain hole-in-the-corner, our godlike Cato
Is said to have said, "May your tribe increase! For at least
When loathsome lust fills the veins, it's all right for our young bloods
To lower themselves to this level, not grind to a pulp
Other men's wives." "Well, I wouldn't want to be praised
In this way," pipes up a man named Desire, well known
As a great connoisseur of family jewels, other families'.
It is well worth while for all who do not wish well
To the pursuit of happiness on the part of adulterers
To hear how rare is their pleasure, how often attended

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By fear and trembling, how prone to end up in real trouble.
One fellow jumped off the roof. Another was flogged
To pieces, nearly. Another in flight fell into
The clutches of roughnecks. Another had to hand over
The money to ransom himself. Another got hosed down
By the kitchen help when they made water: they went even farther
And sliced off some pieces—his works were cut out for him!
"Served him right," as everyone said, except good old Galba.
  It's safer to go second-class, that is, go abroad
With freedwomen only. Sallustius chases them as madly
As someone who goes in for matrons. But if our Sallustius
Wanted to be nice and openhanded, insofar as his means
And good sense indicated, insofar as a modestly liberal
Fellow might be, he would tip the girls just enough,
Not so much as to go bankrupt or get himself talked about.
But he hugs himself with this one great thought, and congratulates
And loves himself for it: "I never lay hands on a matron."
Just as, only a few years ago, that fellow Marsaeus,
The actress Origo's lover, who lavished upon her
His family's farm and estate, was quoted as saying,
"It will never be said that *I* seduced other men's wives."
But—when you go in for actresses, or for fast women,
Your good name fares even worse than your goods. Is it smart
To avoid the adulterer's role, but not keep clear
Of the troubles it brings in its train? You're no adulterer—
But to lose your good name, to mess up your father's estate,
Is bad, however you do it. So what does it matter
Whether you slip with a matron or a slave who has put on the toga?
  The "son-in-law" of Sulla (how the name became him!)
Kept getting it right on the chin in that Fausta affair;
He took more than he should have, poor Villius—got slugged,
    slashed,
Kicked out of the house, while Longarenus had access
To the interior. Now, what if his mind had spoken
As follows, taking the form of his own mellow instrument,
Familiar with such a wide range of pathetic phallacies:
"What *is it* you're after? Did I ever ask you to furnish me,
Even when my dander was up, with a morsel of flesh
Descended from a mighty consul, arrayed as a high-born
Matron?" What could Villius say but, "This girl

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Was born of a powerful father."
How much better off
You would be to lay off what shouldn't be touched, as nature,
Rich in her own resources, advises. MANAGE
Your life: don't mix what's worth having up with what isn't.
Do you think it makes no difference whether your trouble
Is your own fault or simply inheres in the nature of things?
Therefore, to save yourself grief, stop chasing matrons:
Plucking this fruit is a much too troublesome task.
The matron, even though sheathed in pearls and emeralds,
May not have a delicate thigh (like yours, Cerinthus)
Nor a straighter leg than her servant, who's often much better.
Besides, *she* offers her wares without faking, she's open
And aboveboard. She displays what's for sale, and if she *has* charm
She won't flaunt it or flout it in order to muffle her weak points.
After all, this is how the big shots buy horses: the beasts
Are kept under wraps while they look them over: in this way
A good shape cannot take the buyer's eye off a weak hoof
While he drinks in the handsome back, short head, and arched neck.
It's a good way, isn't it? For your part then, don't look
At the good parts with Lynceus' keen eyes and then be as blind
As Hypsaea when it comes to observing defects. "What legs!
What arms!" But what a splay foot, big nose, small behind,
And high hips she's graced with! The matron has nothing on
View, but her face: her full-flowing robe veils the rest
(Unless, of course, she's like Catia). If you seek this forbidden
Fruit, so well barricaded—and of course this is why
You crave it so madly—some things intervene: (1) attendants
(2) a litter, with bearers (3) beauticians, with curlers (4) and scroungers
At each meal (5) a dress reaching down to the ankles (6) a cloak
Circumscribing the whole (7) and lots else, to keep you from having
A real view. The loose woman, now, doesn't make things so hard.
Through her silk dress you can see what she's like in the raw, that her legs
Are all right, and her feet. You can measure her flanks with your eye.
You prefer to be taken in first? Be relieved of your money
Before you've been shown the goods? Our bird-watcher carols:

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Just as the hunter tracks down the hare in deep snow
But if it laid out before him just lets it go—
So my love is ever a rover and likes least to cling
To a sitting duck and likes more to soar after things on the wing.

How poetic! You don't think such jingles will drive out the grief,
The fever, the anxious concern, from your heart? Or do you?
Would you not profit more from shrewdly inquiring of nature
What limits she sets to desire, what she goes without,
What she can't go without without suffering, and profit by learning
To distinguish between romance and mere sexistentialism?
Thirsty, throat-parched, you insist on a gold-covered cup?
Hungry, turn up your nose at everything but
Peacock and flounder? Your passionate part on the rise,
A young servant girl or a nice boy standing right by,
At your service, you choose to explode with your impulse? Not me!
I'll take the pleasure that's easy to get, and accessible.
To quote Philodemus:

Matrons that say "By and by"
Or, "Yes, but more money" or, "Wait 'til my husband is out"
Are for castrated priests, not for the sensible guy.
Give me the freedwoman: the issue is never in doubt.
The tariff? Prix fixe, and never impossibly high.

Let my girl be fair and straight, and made up to look
Simply as tall and as fair as nature has made her.
When her left flank gives in to my right, Alba Long to her!
She's Ilia, she's my Egeria: she's all the nymphs
I can name. And when we make love I don't have to worry
About her husband just dropping in from the country, the door
Splitting open, the dog yapping, house in an uproar of crashing
And pounding on all sides, my girl tumbling head over heels
Out of bed, as white as a sheet, while her maid (and accomplice)
Shrieks it's not *her* fault—deathly afraid of her legs
Being broken as punishment—the wife, thinking now to herself
"There goes my dowry," while I eye myself sprinting off
In a panic, my tunic undone, and trying to salvage
My money, to safeguard my future and save my behind.
IT'S BAD TO GET CAUGHT. The stock Stoic view I be-
grudge,
And I'd win my case even if Fabius sat as the judge.

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MARVIN MUDRICK

The Originality of Conrad

CONRAD OFFERS HIMSELF from the first as a dogged innovator of fictional techniques, like his own Kurtz one of the first thorough explorers of a rather dark continent; and it is tempting to read him for the sophisticated pleasure one takes in recognizing novel and schematizable, if not necessarily expressive, method. A teacher once worked out for his students a chronological chart of the events in *Victory*. The chart proved, of course, Conrad's creative cleverness at mixing up the events and the teacher's critical astuteness at setting them right again. This is one pattern of Conrad criticism. That it is a seductive pattern appears from Henry James's professional admiration for the multiple viewpoints intruding, in *Chance*, between the reader and the events (James placed Conrad "absolutely alone as a votary of the way to do a thing that shall make it undergo most doing"): the only residual doubt being whether, at a fifth or even a second remove, the events of *Chance* have any interest in themselves; whether, for example, once we have pushed through layers of Marlow's gruff archness to arrive at Conrad's inevitable sweet silent slip of a girl and what Mr. Zabel notes as Captain Anthony's "touch of inscrutable sanctimony,"[1] our long attention seems worthwhile.

Length is usually, indeed, no advantage to Conrad. Albert Guerard has asserted that "Conrad's long stories and short novels are far more experimental and more 'modern' than his full-length novels"[2]; and, though it is an assertion that requires reservations, it points to the comparative economy and tact of Conrad's method in pieces like *Typhoon* and *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, to the unfailing grim power of Part I of *Under Western Eyes* (before the novel falls apart in a compulsion to extend itself beyond its normal novella length), as well as to the inert and wilful complications characteristic of such larger works as *Chance*, *Lord Jim*, *Victory*, *Nostromo*, and *The Secret Agent*. Everything Conrad wrote recalls every-

[1]M. D. Zabel (ed.), *The Portable Conrad*, Viking, New York, 1952, pp. 40-41.

[2]Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* and *The Secret Sharer*, introd. Albert Guerard, Jr., Signet, New York, 1950, p. 8.

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thing else he wrote, in a pervasive melancholy of outlook, a persistency of theme ("the plight of the man on whom life closes down inexorably, divesting him of the supports and illusory protection of friendship, social privilege, or love"[3]), and a conscientious manipulation of innovational method; yet what marks Conrad as not a mere experimentalist or entertainer but a genuine innovator occurs only sporadically in his full-length novels, with discretion and sustained impulse only in several long stories or short novels: in *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, in *Typhoon*, in Part I of *Under Western Eyes*, and—with most impressive rich immediacy—in *Heart of Darkness*.

Conrad's innovation—or, in any case, the fictional technique that he exploited with unprecedented thoroughness—is the double-plot: neither allegory (where surface is something teasing, to be got through), nor catch-all symbolism (where every knowing particular signifies some universal or other), but a developing order of actions so lucidly symbolic of a developing state of spirit—from moment to moment, so morally identifiable—as to suggest the conditions of allegory without forfeiting or even subordinating the realistic "superficial" claim of the actions and their actors.

Heart of Darkness—at least until we reach Kurtz and the end of the journey—is a remarkable instance of such order: details intensely present, evocatively characteristic of the situations in which they happen, and prefiguring from moment to moment an unevadable moral reality. The equatorial incubus of inefficiency, for example, is created and consolidated by a set of details memorable in their direct sensuous impact, almost farcical in the situations whose absurd disproportions they discover, and wholly dreadful as a cumulative cosmic denial of mind: the warship (" 'It appears the French had one of their wars going on thereabouts' "), its men dying of fever at the rate of three a day, " 'firing into a continent' "; the forsaken railway truck, looking " 'as dead as the carcass of some animal,' " rusting in the grass " 'on its back with its wheels in the air' "; the fat man with the moustaches trying to put out a blaze in a grass shed with a quart of water in a leaking pail; the brickmaker idling for a year with no bricks and no hope of materials for making them; the " 'wanton smashup' " of drainage pipes abandoned in a ravine; burst, piled-up cases of rivets at the Outer Station, and no way of getting them to the damaged steamboat at the Central Station; the " 'vast

[3]Zabel, *The Portable Conrad*, p. 26.

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artificial hole somebody had been digging on the slope, the purpose of which I found it impossible to divine. It wasn't a quarry or a sandpit, anyhow. It was just a hole' "; the blasting on the cliff—

> "A horn tooted to the right, and I saw the black people run. A heavy and dull detonation shook the ground, a puff of smoke came out of the cliff, and that was all. No change appeared in the face of the rock. They were building a railway. The cliff was not in the way or anything, but the objectless blasting was all the work going on."

In this world of the fortuitous, acutely realized details of nightmare, such efficiency as can survive will be of a very special kind; like the accountant's—

> "Hair parted, brushed, oiled, under a green-lined parasol held in a big white hand. He was amazing, and had a penholder behind his ear.... His appearance was certainly that of a hairdresser's dummy; but in the great demoralization of the land he kept up his appearance. That's backbone. His starched collars and got-up shirt fronts were achievements of character.... I sat generally on the floor, while, of faultless appearance (and even slightly scented), perching on a high stool, he wrote, he wrote, he wrote. Sometimes he stood up for exercise. When a truckle bed with a sick man (some invalid agent from upcountry) was put in there, he exhibited a gentle annoyance. 'The groans of the sick person,' he said, 'distract my attention. And without that it is extremely difficult to guard against clerical errors in this climate.' "

In this climate, where life for a clot of exasperated foreigners contracts itself to the exploitation of the hopelessly alien, it is also difficult to guard against certain explicit moral errors; among them, a cruelty as ordained and unimpassioned as in " 'the gloomy circle of some inferno' ":

> "Black shapes crouched, lay, sat between the trees leaning against the trunks, clinging to the earth, half coming out, half effaced within the dim light, in all the attitudes of pain, abandonment, and despair. Another mine on the cliff went off, followed by a slight shudder of the soil under my feet. The work was going on. The work! And this was the place where some of the helpers had withdrawn to die."

The work defines and embodies itself in its reluctant functionaries, starched accountant as well as dying natives; it has its particular countersign and gleaming talisman (" 'The word "ivory" rang in the air, was whispered, was sighed. You would think they were praying to it. A taint of imbecile rapacity blew through it all, like a whiff from some corpse' "); in its tangible promise of easy gratifications, it indifferently victimizes both the unwilling natives and their incompetent overseers, it prescribes the tableau of cruelty

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in the grove of death, it provides its own corresponding niche for every stage of opportunism from the novice exploiter (weight 224 pounds) who keeps fainting, to the manager of the Central Station, the man with the single talent and the essential defect—

> "He was obeyed, yet he inspired neither love nor fear, nor even respect. He inspired uneasiness. That was it! Uneasiness. Not a definite mistrust—just uneasiness—nothing more. You have no idea how effective such a . . . a . . . faculty can be. . . . Once when various tropical diseases had laid low almost every 'agent' in the station, he was heard to say, 'Men who come out here should have no entrails.' "

The general blight and demoralization are inextricable, they do not detach themselves for scrutiny, from the developing order of actions that intensely brings them to mind; they have no independent symbolic existence, nor do any other of the spreading abstractions and big ideas in the narrative. Even the journey into the heart of darkness—the more obvious broad symbolic provocations of which have given joy to so many literary amateurs—insofar as it has artistic (rather than merely psychoanalytic) force, is finely coincident with its network of details; its moral nature steadily reveals itself not in the rather predictable grand gestures of Conradian rhetoric (" 'Going upriver was like going back to beginnings, when vegetation rioted and the big trees were kings' "), but in the unavoidable facts of suspense, strangeness, vigilance, danger, and fear: the difficulties of piloting the patched fragile steamer past hidden banks, snags, sunken stones upriver; the sudden " 'glimpse of rush walls, of peaked grass roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling, under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage' "; the honest, " 'unmistakably real' " book mysteriously discovered in the abandoned hut; the terrified savage tending the boiler, who " 'squinted at the steam gange with an evident effort of intrepidity' "; the arrows from nowhere; the death of the black helmsman (" 'The man had rolled on his back and stared straight up at me; both his hands clutched that cane. It was the shaft of a spear that, either thrown or lunged through the opening, had caught him in the side just below the ribs; the blade had gone in out of sight, after making a frightful gash; my shoes were full; a pool of blood lay very still, gleaming dark-red under the wheel; his eyes shone with an amazing luster' "); and, most shocking of all in its evocation of mind at an intolerable extremity, the climactic farcical detail of Marlow's panic to get

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rid of his shoes and socks overflowing with a dead man's blood—

> "To tell you the truth, I was morbidly anxious to change my shoes and socks. 'He is dead,' murmured the fellow, immensely impressed. 'No doubt about it,' said I, tugging like mad at the shoelaces."

When Conrad is called, with a clear confidence that the judgment is general and will not be challenged, "perhaps the finest prose stylist"[4] among the English novelists, it is doubtless such passages as these that the critic has in mind. One wonders, then, what the critic makes of such equally representative Conradian passages as the following:

> "It was the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention."

> "I tried to break the spell—the heavy, mute spell of the wilderness—that seemed to draw him to its pitiless breast by the awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts, by the memory of gratified and monstrous passions."

> "I heard a light sigh and then my heart stood still, stopped dead short by an exulting and terrible cry, by the cry of inconceivable triumph and of unspeakable pain. 'I knew it—I was sure!' . . . She knew. She was sure."

Qualifying his account of Conrad as one of the four masters of English fiction, Dr. Leavis makes the definitive comment on this sort of thing: "Conrad must here stand convicted of borrowing the arts of the magazine-writer (who has borrowed his, shall we say, from Kipling and Poe) in order to impose on his readers and on himself, for thrilled response, a 'significance' that is merely an emotional insistence on the presence of what he can't produce. The insistence betrays the absence, the willed 'intensity' the nullity. He is intent on making a virtue out of not knowing what he means."[5]

Qualification, however, is not enough. Conrad's lapses of this sort are not rare or incidental, they do not merely weaken his master style but schismatically parallel it in a style of their own. The "finest prose stylist" in English fiction has in fact two styles: the narrative-descriptive, in which explicit details triumphantly cohere with implicit moral moments in an accumulating point-to-point correspondence (a style whose purest, if not most imposingly complex, manifestation may be examined in *Typhoon*); and the oracular-ruminative, which dotes on abstractions, ex-

[4]Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* and *The Secret Sharer*, p. 7.
[5]F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, Anchor, New York, 1954, p. 219.

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clamations, unexpressive indirections, pat ironies ("the arts of the magazine-writer"), a style which takes over, especially in the large-scale works, whenever Conrad loses faith in the power of his details to enforce both their own reality and the symbolic substructure whose contours they are intended to suggest—so Marlow cries out as he and his author signalize, in a joint loss of faith, their drift from master to meretricious style, " 'I've been telling you what we said—repeating the phrases we pronounced —but what's the good?' "

Conrad's symbolism, and his moral imagination, are, after all, as unallegorical as possible. When they function and have effect they are severely realistic: they nourish themselves on voices heard and solid objects seen and touched in the natural world, they contract into rhetoric as soon as the voices and objects begin to appear less than independently present; when Conrad is not describing, with direct sensuous impact, a developing sequence of distinct actions, he is liable to drift into the mooning or glooming that for some critics passes as Conrad's "philosophy" and for others as his style in its full tropical luxuriance.

Moreover, to assume, as Dr. Leavis seems to assume, that all symbolism works *only* as it is anchored to a record of immediate sensations, that it must totally coincide with "the concrete presentment of incident, setting and image," is to transform Conrad's limitation (and gift) into a condition of fiction. To compare Conrad's symbolic method, his two-ply plot, with the methods of, say, Dostoievsky and Kafka is to become aware of radically different possibilities: on the one hand, Conrad's realistic mode; on the other, moral imaginations not necessarily anchored to objects and places, symbolic means capable of producing, for example, those vibrations of clairvoyant hallucination in Dostoievsky, and of meaningful enigma in Kafka, which move through and beyond immediate sensations into a world of moral meanings almost as independent as, and far more densely populated than, the other side of the mirror of traditional allegory. Of such effects, beyond the capacities of even the most evocative realism, Conrad is innocent; yet when, in *Heart of Darkness*, he approaches the center of a difficult moral situation (desperately more troublesome than the simple choices permitted the characters in *Typhoon*), when facts and details begin to appear inadequate as figurations of the moral problem, it is just such effects that he is at length driven to attempt.

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The problem is, of course, Kurtz. It is when we are on the verge of meeting Kurtz that Marlow's "inconceivables" and "impenetrables" begin to multiply at an alarming rate; it is when we have already met him that we are urged to observe "smiles of indefinable meaning" and to hear about "unspeakable rites" and "gratified and monstrous passions" and "subtle horrors"—words to hound the reader into a sense of enigmatic awfulness that he would somehow be the better for not trying to find a way through:

> "Everything belonged to him—but that was a trifle. The thing was to know what he belonged to, how many powers of darkness claimed him for their own. That was the reflection that made you creepy all over. It was impossible—it was not good for one either—trying to imagine."

The problem, as Conrad sets it up, is to persuade the reader—by epithets, exclamations, ironies, by every technical obliquity—into an hallucinated awareness of the unplumbable depravity, the primal unanalyzable evil, implicit in Kurtz's reversion to the jungle from the high moral sentiments of his report:

> "The peroration was magnificent, though difficult to remember, you know. It gave me the notion of an exotic Immensity ruled by an august Benevolence."

Unhappily, though, the effect of even this minor irony is to bring to mind and penetrate Conrad's magazine-writer style as well as the hollowness of Kurtz's sentiments. Besides, Kurtz's sentiments must, to help justify the fuss Conrad makes about their author, radiate at least a rhetorical energy; yet all Conrad gives us of the report is a phrase or two of mealy-mouthed reformist exhortation that would not do credit to a Maugham missionary let alone the "extraordinary man" Kurtz is supposed by all accounts to be, so that the "irony" of the scrawled outcry at the end of the report—"Exterminate the brutes!"—is about as subtle and unexpected as the missionary's falling for the local call-girl.

In the effort to establish for Kurtz an opaque and terrifying magnitude, Conrad tends to rely more and more oppressively on these pat ironies. The very existence of the incredibly naïve young Russian is another such irony: the disciple who responds to Kurtz's abundant proofs of cruelty and mean obsession with the steadfast conviction—and no evidence for the reader—that Kurtz is a great man (" ' "he's enlarged my mind" ' "—another irony that cuts more ways than Conrad must have intended). And if the culminating irony of the narrative, Marlow's interview with

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Kurtz's Intended, is expertly anticipated long before, when Marlow remarks—

> "You know I hate, detest, and can't bear a lie, not because I am straighter than the rest of us, but simply because it appalls me. There is a taint of death, a flavor of mortality in lies—which is exactly what I hate and detest in the world—what I want to forget. It makes me miserable and sick, like biting something rotten would do."

—it is all the more disheartening, after such anticipation, to encounter in that interview sighs, heart stoppings, chill grips in the chest, exultations, the cheaply ironic double-talk (" 'She said suddenly very low, "He died as he lived." "His end," said I, with dull anger stirring in me, "was in every way worthy of his life." ' ") as well as the sentimental lie that provokes not only her " 'cry of inconceivable triumph and of unspeakable pain' " but the final cheap irony (" '"I knew it—I was sure!" She knew. She was sure.' ") —a jumble of melodramatic tricks so unabashed and so strategic that in any less reputable writer they might well be critically regarded as earning for the work an instant oblivion.

Still, in *Heart of Darkness* at least, Conrad is neither cynical nor laxly sentimental in his failure of imagination and corresponding failure of technique. The theme itself is too much for him, too much for perhaps any but the very greatest dramatists and novelists. The sense of evil he must somehow project exceeds his capacity for imagining it; he strains into badness while reaching for verifications of a great and somber theme that is beyond his own very considerable powers.

One instructive comparison is with James's *The Turn of the Screw*, another short novel that builds toward a vision of absolute unspecifiable evil. To be thrilled by the "unspecified 'horrors' "[6] of this Jamesian virtuoso-exercise is to react just as James prescribes. Both *Heart of Darkness* and *The Turn of the Screw* aim at conjuring up—the former, in the pages devoted to Kurtz, by incantation; the latter, throughout, by a sophisticated choice among the stock devices of the ghost-story—sequences of unspecified horrors that produce a moment-to-moment disquiet, and that will at length converge into a sense of smothering evil. But both works are eventually too willed, too consciously literary, too gentlemanly almost: Conrad's incantation and James's ingenuity begin to

[6]As many critics have been, including Leon Edel (*Henry James: The Untried Years*, Lippincott, Philadelphia, 1953, p. 175).

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obtrude from the text, to disengage themselves even from their momentary effects. (And neither work shows any capacity for achieving that almost independent sustained atmosphere of universal disquiet which—in Dostoievsky or in Kafka, for example—*is* the sense of evil.) The *coup de grâce* in both, however, is administered by their uneasy tendency to go beyond techniques that merely suggest and, after ineffectual or spurious indirectness, to fall into a disastrous specification: to attempt a particular embodiment of the idea of evil. In *The Turn of the Screw*, evil tends to specify itself dramatically—with hand over gaping mouth—as casual coupling among the servants, and beautiful children uttering naughty words (the trivially prurient Puritan reduction of the big idea of evil); in *Heart of Darkness*, for Conrad, the simple honorable civilized sailor, Kurtz's vision of "the horror" tends to dissolve at last into a wide-screen panorama of "unimaginable" orgies at "midnight dances" with hordes of Hollywood natives howling round pyres of human sacrifice. Ultimately, as both authors lose faith in all their contrived implicitnesses, the horrors are only too plainly and justly specified.

Heart of Darkness is, of course, as serious as *The Turn of the Screw* is not. Even in its failure it does not trifle, rather it anxiously falls short, it has its own intermittent costume-jewelry glitter but nothing like the uninterrupted cynical dilettantism of James's deliberate hair-raiser. It is in fact one of those mixed structures whose partial success (not so neatly separable as, for example, Part I of *Under Western Eyes*) is so profound, so unprecedented, and so strikingly irreplaceable as to survive a proportion and gravity of failure that would sink forever any other work.

It is one of the great originals of literature. After *Heart of Darkness* the craftsman in fiction could never again be unaware of the moral resources inherent in every recorded sensation, or insensitive to the need of making the most precise record possible of every sensation: what now appears an immemorial cliché of the craft of fiction has a date as recent as the turn of the century. If Conrad was never quite equal to his own originality, he was at least the first to designate it as a new province of possibilities for the novelist; and, in *Heart of Darkness*, the first to suggest, by large and compelling partial proof, the intensity of moral illumination that a devoted attention to its demands might generate. The suggestion was an historical event: for good and bad novelists alike, irreversible. After *Heart of Darkness*, the recorded moment—the word—was irrecoverably symbol.

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LAWRENCE SARGENT HALL

The Ledge

On Christmas morning before sunup the fisherman embraced his warm wife and left his close bed. She did not want him to go. It was Christmas morning. He was a big, raw man, with too much strength, whose delight in winter was to hunt the sea ducks that flew in to feed by the outer ledges, bare at low tide.

As his bare feet touched the cold floor and the frosty air struck his nude flesh, he might have changed his mind in the dark of this special day. It was a home day, which made it seem natural to think of the outer ledges merely as some place he had shot ducks in the past. But he had promised his son, thirteen, and his nephew, fifteen, who came from inland. That was why he had given them his present of an automatic shotgun each the night before, on Christmas Eve. Rough man though he was known to be, and no spoiler of boys, he kept his promises when he understood what they meant. And to the boys, as to him, home meant where you came for rest after you had had your Christmas fill of action and excitement.

His legs astride, his arms raised, the fisherman stretched as high as he could in the dim privacy of his bedroom. Above the snug murmur of his wife's protest he heard the wind in the pines and knew it was easterly as the boys had hoped and he had surmised the night before. Conditions would be ideal, and when they were, anybody ought to take advantage of them. The birds would be flying. The boys would get a man's sport their first time outside on the ledges.

His son at thirteen, small but steady and experienced, was fierce to grow up in hunting, to graduate from sheltered waters and the blinds along the shores of the inner bay. His nephew at fifteen, an overgrown farm boy, had a farm boy's love of the sea, though he could not swim a stroke and was often sick in choppy weather. That was the reason his father, the fisherman's brother, was a farmer and chose to sleep in on the holiday morning at his brother's house. Many of the ones the farmer had grown up with were regularly seasick and could not swim, but they were unafraid of the water. They could not have dreamed of being anything but fisher-

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men. The fisherman himself could swim like a seal and was never sick, and he would sooner die than be anything else.

He dressed in the cold and dark, and woke the boys gruffly. They tumbled out of bed, their instincts instantly awake while their thoughts still fumbled slumbrously. The fisherman's wife in the adjacent bedroom heard them apparently trying to find their clothes, mumbling sleepily and happily to each other, while her husband went down to the hot kitchen to fry eggs—sunny-side up, she knew, because that was how they all liked them.

Always in winter she hated to have them go outside, the weather was so treacherous and there were so few others out in case of trouble. To the fisherman these were no more than woman's fears, to be taken for granted and laughed off. When they were first married they fought miserably every fall because she was after him constantly to put his boat up until spring. The fishing was all outside in winter, and though prices were high the storms made the rate of attrition high on gear. Nevertheless he did well. So she could do nothing with him.

People thought him a hard man, and gave him the reputation of being all out for himself because he was inclined to brag and be disdainful. If it was true, and his own brother was one of those who strongly felt it was, they lived better than others, and his brother had small right to criticize. There had been times when in her loneliness she had yearned to leave him for another man. But it would have been dangerous. So over the years she had learned to shut her mind to his hard-driving, and take what comfort she might from his unsympathetic competence. Only once or twice, perhaps, had she gone so far as to dwell guiltily on what it would be like to be a widow.

The thought that her boy, possibly because he was small, would not be insensitive like his father, and the rattle of dishes and smell of frying bacon downstairs in the kitchen shut off from the rest of the chilly house, restored the cozy feeling she had had before she was alone in bed. She heard them after a while go out and shut the back door.

Under her window she heard the snow grind drily beneath their boots, and her husband's sharp, exasperated commands to the boys. She shivered slightly in the envelope of her own warmth. She listened to the noise of her son and nephew talking elatedly

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Twice she caught the glimmer of their lights on the white ceiling above the window as they went down the path to the shore. There would be frost on the skiff and freezing suds at the water's edge. She herself used to go gunning when she was younger; now, it seemed to her, anyone going out like that on Christmas morning had to be incurably male. They would none of them think about her until they returned and piled the birds they had shot on top of the sink for her to dress.

Ripping into the quiet pre-dawn cold she heard the hot snarl of the outboard taking them out to the boat. It died as abruptly as it had burst into life. Two or three or four or five minutes later the big engine broke into a warm reassuring roar. He had the best of equipment, and he kept it in the best of condition. She closed her eyes. It would not be too long before the others would be up for Christmas. The summer drone of the exhaust deepened. Then gradually it faded in the wind until it was lost at sea, or she slept.

The engine had started immediately in spite of the temperature. This put the fisherman in a good mood. He was proud of his boat. Together he and the two boys heaved the skiff and outboard onto the stern and secured it athwartships. His son went forward along the deck, iridescent in the ray of the light the nephew shone through the windshield, and cast the mooring pennant loose into darkness. The fisherman swung to starboard, glanced at his compass, and headed seaward down the obscure bay.

There would be just enough visibility by the time they reached the headland to navigate the crooked channel between the islands. It was the only nasty stretch of water. The fisherman had done it often in fog or at night—he always swore he could go anywhere in the bay blindfolded—but there was no sense in taking chances if you didn't have to. From the mouth of the channel he could lay a straight course for Brown Cow Island, anchor the boat out of sight behind it, and from the skiff set their tollers off Devil's Hump three hundred yards to seaward. By then the tide would be clearing the ledge and they could land and be ready to shoot around half-tide.

It was early, it was Christmas, and it was farther out than most hunters cared to go in this season of the closing year, so that he felt sure no one would be taking possession ahead of them. He had shot thousands of ducks there in his day. The Hump was by far the best hunting. Only thing was you had to plan for the right conditions

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because you didn't have too much time. About four hours was all, and you had to get it before three in the afternoon when the birds left and went out to sea ahead of nightfall.

They had it figured exactly right for today. The ledge would not be going under until after the gunning was over, and they would be home for supper in good season. With a little luck the boys would have a skiff-load of birds to show for their first time outside. Well beyond the legal limit, which was no matter. You took what you could get in this life, or the next man made out and you didn't.

The fisherman had never failed to make out gunning from Devil's Hump. And this trip, he had a hunch, would be above ordinary. The easterly wind would come up just stiff enough, the tide was right, and it was going to storm by tomorrow morning so the birds would be moving. Things were perfect.

The old fierceness was in his bones. Keeping a weather eye to the murk out front and a hand on the wheel, he reached over and cuffed both boys playfully as they stood together close to the heat of the exhaust pipe running up through the center of the house. They poked back at him and shouted above the drumming engine, making bets as they always did on who would shoot the most birds. This trip they had the thrill of new guns, the best money could buy, and a man's hunting ground. The black retriever wagged at them and barked. He was too old and arthritic to be allowed in December water, but he was jaunty anyway at being brought along.

Groping in his pocket for his pipe the fisherman suddenly had his high spirits rocked by the discovery that he had left his tobacco at home. He swore. Anticipation of a day out with nothing to smoke made him incredulous. He searched his clothes, and then he searched them again, unable to believe the tobacco was not somewhere. When the boys inquired what was wrong he spoke angrily to them, blaming them for being in some devious way at fault. They were instantly crestfallen and willing to put back after the tobacco, though they could appreciate what it meant only through his irritation. But he bitterly refused. That would throw everything out of phase. He was a man who did things the way he set out to do.

He clamped his pipe between his teeth, and twice more during the next few minutes he ransacked his clothes in disbelief. He was no stoic. For one relaxed moment he considered putting about and gunning somewhere nearer home. Instead he held his course and

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sucked the empty pipe, consoling himself with the reflection that at least he had whiskey enough if it got too uncomfortable on the ledge. Peremptorily he made the boys check to make certain the bottle was really in the knapsack with the lunches where he thought he had taken care to put it. When they reassured him he despised his fate a little less.

The fisherman's judgment was as usual accurate. By the time they were abreast of the headland there was sufficient light so that he could wind his way among the reefs without slackening speed. At last he turned his bows toward open ocean, and as the winter dawn filtered upward through long layers of smoky cloud on the eastern rim his spirits rose again with it.

He opened the throttle, steadied on his course, and settled down to the two hour run. The wind was stronger but seemed less cold coming from the sea. The boys had withdrawn from the fisherman and were talking together while they watched the sky through the windows. The boat churned solidly through a light chop, flinging spray off her flaring bows. Astern the headland thinned rapidly till it lay like a blackened sill on the grey water. No other boats were abroad.

The boys fondled their new guns, sighted along the barrels, worked the mechanisms, compared notes, boasted, and gave each other contradictory advice. The fisherman got their attention once and pointed at the horizon. They peered through the windows and saw what looked like a black scum floating on top of gently agitated water. It wheeled and tilted, rippled, curled, then rose, strung itself out and became a huge raft of ducks escaping over the sea. A good sign.

The boys rushed out and leaned over the washboards in the wind and spray to see the flock curl below the horizon. Then they went and hovered around the hot engine, bewailing their lot. If only they had been already set out and waiting. Maybe these ducks would be crazy enough to return later and be slaughtered. Ducks were known to be foolish.

In due course and right on schedule they anchored at midmorning in the lee of Brown Cow Island. They put the skiff overboard and loaded it with guns, knapsacks, and tollers. The boys showed their eagerness by being clumsy. The fisherman showed his in bad temper and abuse which they silently accepted in the ab-

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sorbed tolerance of being boys. No doubt they laid it to lack of tobacco.

By outboard they rounded the island and pointed due east in the direction of a ridge of foam which could be seen whitening the surface three hundred yards away. They set the decoys in a broad, straddling vee opening wide into the ocean. The fisherman warned them not to get their hands wet, and when they did he made them carry on with red and painful fingers, in order to teach them. Once the last toller was bobbing among his fellows, brisk and alluring, they got their numbed fingers inside their oilskins and hugged their warm crotches. In the meantime the fisherman had turned the skiff toward the patch of foam where as if by magic, like a black glossy rib of earth, the ledge had broken through the belly of the sea.

Carefully they inhabited their slippery nub of the North American continent, while the unresting Atlantic swelled and swirled as it had for eons round the indomitable edges. They hauled the skiff after them, established themselves as comfortably as they could in a shallow sump on top, lay on their sides a foot or so above the water, and waited, guns in hand.

In time the fisherman took a thermos bottle from the knapsack and they drank steaming coffee, and waited for the nodding decoys to lure in the first flight to the rock. Eventually the boys got hungry and restless. The fisherman let them open the picnic lunch and eat one sandwich apiece, which they both shared with the dog. Having no tobacco the fisherman himself would not eat.

Actually the day was relatively mild, and they were warm enough at present in their woolen clothes and socks underneath oilskins and hip boots. After a while, however, the boys began to feel cramped. Their nerves were agonized by inactivity. The nephew complained and was severely told by the fisherman—who pointed to the dog, crouched unmoving except for his white-rimmed eyes—that part of doing a man's hunting was learning how to wait. But he was beginning to have misgivings of his own. This could be one of those days where all the right conditions masked an incalculable flaw.

If the fisherman had been alone, as he often was, stopping off when the necessary coincidence of tide and time occurred on his way home from hauling trawls, and had plenty of tobacco, he would

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not have fidgeted. The boys' being nervous made him nervous. He growled at them again. When it came it was likely to come all at once, and then in a few moments be over. He warned them not to slack off, never to slack off, to be always ready. Under his rebuke they kept their tortured peace, though they could not help shifting and twisting until he lost what patience he had left and bullied them into lying still. A duck could see an eyelid twitch. If the dog could go without moving so could they.

"Here it comes!" the fisherman said tersely at last.

The boys quivered with quick relief. The flock came in downwind, quartering slightly, myriad, black, and swift.

"Beautiful—" breathed the fisherman's son.

"All right," said the fisherman, intense and precise. "Aim at singles in the thickest part of the flock. Wait for me to fire and then don't stop shooting till your gun's empty." He rolled up onto his left elbow and spread his legs to brace himself. The flock bore down, arrowy and vibrant, then a hundred yards beyond the decoys it veered off.

"They're going away!" the boys cried, sighting in.

"Not yet!" snapped the fisherman. "They're coming round."

The flock changed shape, folded over itself, and drove into the wind in a tight arc. "Thousands—" the boys hissed through their teeth. All at once a whistling storm of black and white broke over the decoys.

"Now!" the fisherman shouted. "Perfect!" And he opened fire at the flock just as it hung suspended in momentary chaos above the tollers. The three pulled at their triggers and the birds splashed into the water, until the last report went off unheard, the last smoking shell flew unheeded over their shoulders, and the last of the routed flock scattered diminishing, diminishing, diminishing in every direction.

Exultantly the boys dropped their guns, jumped up and scrambled for the skiff.

"I'll handle that skiff!" the fisherman shouted at them. They stopped. Gripping the painter and balancing himself he eased the skiff into the water stern first and held the bow hard against the side of the rock shelf the skiff had rested on. "You stay here," he said to his nephew. "No sense in all three of us going in the boat."

The boy on the reef gazed at the grey water rising and falling hypnotically along the glistening edge. It had dropped about a foot

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since their arrival. "I want to go with you," he said in a sullen tone, his eyes on the streaming eddies.

"You want to do what I tell you if you want to gun with me," answered the fisherman harshly. The boy couldn't swim, and he wasn't going to have him climbing in and out of the skiff any more than necessary. Besides he was too big.

The fisherman took his son in the skiff and cruised round and round among the decoys picking up dead birds. Meanwhile the other boy stared unmoving after them from the highest part of the ledge. Before they had quite finished gathering the dead birds, the fisherman cut the outboard and dropped to his knees in the skiff. "Down!" he yelled. "Get down!" About a dozen birds came tolling in. "Shoot—shoot!" his son hollered from the bottom of the boat to the boy on the ledge.

The dog, who had been running back and forth whining, sank to his belly, his muzzle on his forepaws. But the boy on the ledge never stirred. The ducks took late alarm at the skiff, swerved aside and into the air, passing with a whirr no more than fifty feet over the head of the boy, who remained on the ledge like a statue, without his gun, watching the two crouching in the boat.

The fisherman's son climbed onto the ledge and held the painter. The bottom of the skiff was covered with feathery black and white bodies with feet upturned and necks lolling. He was jubilant. "We got twenty-seven!" he told his cousin. "How's that? Nine apiece. Boy—" he added, "what a cool Christmas!"

The fisherman pulled the skiff onto its shelf and all three went and lay down again in anticipation of the next flight. The son, reloading, patted his shotgun affectionately. "I'm going to get me ten next time," he said. Then he asked his cousin, "Whatsamatter—didn't you see the strays?"

"Yeah," the boy said.

"How come you didn't shoot at 'em?"

"Didn't feel like it," replied the boy, still with a trace of sullenness.

"You stupid or something?" The fisherman's son was astounded. "What a highlander!" But the fisherman, though he said nothing, knew that the older boy had had an attack of ledge fever.

"Cripes!" his son kept at it. "I'd at least of tried."

"Shut up," the fisherman finally told him, "and leave him be."

At slack water three more flocks came in, one right after the

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other, and when it was over, the skiff was half full of clean, dead birds. During the subsequent lull they broke out the lunch and ate it all and finished the hot coffee. For a while the fisherman sucked away on his cold pipe. Then he had himself a swig of whiskey.

The boys passed the time contentedly jabbering about who shot the most—there were ninety-two all told— which of their friends they would show the biggest ones to, how many each could eat at a meal provided they didn't have to eat any vegetables. Now and then they heard sporadic distant gunfire on the mainland, at its nearest point about two miles to the north. Once far off they saw a fishing boat making in the direction of home.

At length the fisherman got a hand inside his oilskins and produced his watch.

"Do we have to go now?" asked his son.

"Not just yet," he replied. "Pretty soon." Everything had been perfect. As good as he had ever had it. Because he was getting tired of the boys' chatter he got up, heavily in his hip boots, and stretched. The tide had turned and was coming in, the sky was more ashen, and the wind had freshened enough so that whitecaps were beginning to blossom. It would be a good hour before they had to leave the ledge and pick up the tollers. However, he guessed they would leave a little early. On account of the rising wind he doubted there would be much more shooting. He stepped carefully along the back of the ledge, to work his kinks out. It was also getting a little colder.

The whiskey had begun to warm him, but he was unprepared for the sudden blaze that flashed upward inside him from belly to head. He was standing looking at the shelf where the skiff was. Only the foolish skiff was not there!

For the second time that day the fisherman felt the deep vacuity of disbelief. He gaped, seeing nothing but the flat shelf of rock. He whirled, started toward the boys, slipped, recovered himself, fetched a complete circle, and stared at the unimaginably empty shelf. Its emptiness made him feel as if everything he had done that day so far he had dreamed. What could have happened? The tide was still nearly a foot below. There had been no sea to speak of. The skiff could hardly have slid off by itself. For the life of him, consciously careful as he inveterately was, he could not now remember hauling it up the last time. Perhaps in the heat of hunting,

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he had left it to the boy. Perhaps he could not remember which was the last time.

"Christ—" he exclaimed loudly, without realizing it because he was so entranced by the invisible event.

"What's wrong, Dad?" asked his son, getting to his feet.

The fisherman went blind with uncontainable rage. "Get back down there where you belong!" he screamed. He scarcely noticed the boy sink back in amazement. In a frenzy he ran along the ledge thinking the skiff might have been drawn up at another place, though he knew better. There was no other place.

He stumbled, half falling, back to the boys who were gawking at him in consternation, as though he had gone insane. "God damn it!" he yelled savagely, grabbing both of them and yanking them to their knees. "Get on your feet!"

"What's wrong?" his son repeated in a stifled voice.

"Never mind what's wrong," he snarled. "Look for the skiff—it's adrift!" When they peered around he gripped their shoulders, brutally facing them about. "Down wind—" He slammed his fist against his thigh. "Jesus!" he cried, struck to madness at their stupidity.

At last he sighted the skiff himself, magically bobbing along the grim sea like a toller, a quarter of a mile to leeward on a direct course for home. The impulse to strip himself naked was succeeded instantly by a queer calm. He simply sat down on the ledge and forgot everything except the marvellous mystery.

As his awareness partially returned he glanced toward the boys. They were still observing the skiff speechlessly. Then he was gazing into the clear young eyes of his son.

"Dad," asked the boy steadily, "what do we do now?"

That brought the fisherman upright. "The first thing we have to do," he heard himself saying with infinite tenderness as if he were making love, "is think."

"Could you swim it?" asked his son.

He shook his head and smiled at them. They smiled quickly back, too quickly. "A hundred yards maybe, in this water. I wish I could," he added. It was the most intimate and pitiful thing he had ever said. He walked in circles round them, trying to break the stall his mind was left in.

He gauged the level of the water. To the eye it was quite station-

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ary, six inches from the shelf at this second. The fisherman did not have to mark it on the side of the rock against the passing of time to prove to his reason that it was rising, always rising. Already it was over the brink of reason, beyond the margins of thought—a senseless measurement. No sense to it.

All his life the fisherman had tried to lick the element of time, by getting up earlier and going to bed later, owning a faster boat, planning more than the day would hold, and tackling just one other job before the deadline fell. If, as on rare occasions he had the grand illusion, he ever really had beaten the game, he would need to call on all his reserves of practice and cunning now.

He sized up the scant but unforgivable three hundred yards to Brown Cow Island. Another hundred yards behind it his boat rode at anchor, where, had he been aboard, he could have cut in a fathometer to plumb the profound and occult seas, or a ship-to-shore radio on which in an interminably short time he would have heard his wife's voice talking to him over the air about homecoming.

"Couldn't we wave something so somebody would see us?" his nephew suggested.

The fisherman spun round. "Load your guns!" he ordered. They loaded as if the air had suddenly gone frantic with birds. "I'll fire once and count to five. Then you fire. Count to five. That way they won't just think it's only somebody gunning ducks. We'll keep doing that."

"We've only got just two-and-a-half boxes left," said his son.

The fisherman nodded, understanding that from beginning to end their situation was purely mathematical, like the ticking of the alarm clock in his silent bedroom. Then he fired. The dog, who had been keeping watch over the decoys, leaped forward and yelped in confusion. They all counted off, fired the first five rounds by threes, and reloaded. The fisherman scanned first the horizon, then the contracting borders of the ledge, which was the sole place the water appeared to be climbing. Soon it would be over the shelf.

They counted off and fired the second five rounds. "We'll hold off a while on the last one," the fisherman told the boys. He sat down and pondered what a trivial thing was a skiff. This one he and the boy had knocked together in a day. Was a gun, manufactured for killing.

His son tallied up the remaining shells, grouping them symmetrically in threes on the rock when the wet box fell apart. "Two

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short," he announced. They reloaded and laid the guns on their knees.

Behind thickening clouds they could not see the sun going down. The water, coming up, was growing blacker. The fisherman thought he might have told his wife they would be home before dark since it was Christmas day. He realized he had forgotten about its being any particular day. The tide would not be high until two hours after sunset. When they did not get in by nightfall, and could not be raised by radio, she might send somebody to hunt for them right away. He rejected this arithmetic immediately, with a sickening shock, recollecting it was a two-and-a-half hour run at best. Then it occurred to him that she might send somebody on the mainland who was nearer. She would think he had engine trouble.

He rose and searched the shoreline, barely visible. Then his glance dropped to the toy shoreline at the edges of the reef. The shrinking ledge, so sinister from a boat, grew dearer minute by minute as though the whole wide world he gazed on from horizon to horizon balanced on its contracting rim. He checked the water level and found the shelf awash.

Some of what went through his mind the fisherman told to the boys. They accepted it without comment. If he caught their eyes they looked away to spare him or because they were not yet old enough to face what they saw. Mostly they watched the rising water. The fisherman was unable to initiate a word of encouragement. He wanted one of them to ask him whether somebody would reach them ahead of the tide. He would have found it possible to say yes. But they did not inquire.

The fisherman was not sure how much, at their age, they were able to imagine. Both of them had seen from the docks drowned bodies put ashore out of boats. Sometimes they grasped things, and sometimes not. He supposed they might be longing for the comfort of their mothers, and was astonished, as much as he was capable of any astonishment except the supreme one, to discover himself wishing he had not left his wife's dark, close, naked bed that morning.

"Is it time to shoot now?" asked his nephew.

"Pretty soon," he said, as if he were putting off making good on a promise. "Not yet."

His own boy cried softly for a brief moment, like a man, his face averted in an effort neither to give or show pain.

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"Before school starts," the fisherman said, wonderfully detached, "we'll go to town and I'll buy you boys anything you want."

With great difficulty, in a dull tone as though he did not in the least desire it, his son said after a pause, "I'd like one of those new thirty-horse outboards."

"All right," said the fisherman. And to his nephew, "How about you?"

The nephew shook his head desolately. "I don't want anything," he said.

After another pause the fisherman's son said, "Yes he does, Dad. He wants one too."

"All right—" the fisherman said again, and said no more.

The dog whined in uncertainty and licked the boys' faces where they sat together. Each threw an arm over his back and hugged him. Three strays flew in and sat companionably down among the stiff-necked decoys. The dog crouched, obedient to his training. The boys observed them listlessly. Presently, sensing something untoward, the ducks took off, splashing the wave tops with feet and wingtips, into the dusky waste.

The sea began to make up in the mounting wind, and the wind bore a new and deathly chill. The fisherman, scouring the somber, dwindling shadow of the mainland for a sign, hoped it would not snow. But it did. First a few flakes, then a flurry, then storming past horizontally. The fisherman took one long, bewildered look at Brown Cow Island three hundred yards dead to leeward, and got to his feet.

Then it shut in, as if what was happening on the ledge was too private even for the last wan light of the expiring day.

"Last round," the fisherman said austerely.

The boys rose and shouldered their tacit guns. The fisherman fired into the flying snow. He counted methodically to five. His son fired and counted. His nephew. All three fired and counted. Four rounds.

"You've got one left, Dad," his son said.

The fisherman hesitated another second, then he fired the final shell. Its pathetic report, like the spat of a popgun, whipped away on the wind and was instantly blanketed in falling snow.

Night fell all in a moment to meet the ascending sea. They were now barely able to make one another out through driving snowflakes, dim as ghosts in their yellow oilskins. The fisherman heard

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a sea break and glanced down where his feet were. They seemed to be wound in a snowy sheet. Gently he took the boys by the shoulders and pushed them in front of him, feeling with his feet along the shallow sump to the place where it triangulated into a sharp crevice at the highest point of the ledge. "Face ahead," he told them. "Put the guns down."

"I'd like to hold mine, Dad," begged his son.

"Put it down," said the fisherman. "The tide won't hurt it. Now brace your feet against both sides and stay there."

They felt the dog, who was pitch black, running up and down in perplexity between their straddled legs. "Dad," said his son, "what about the pooch?"

If he had called the dog by name it would have been too personal. The fisherman would have wept. As it was he had all he could do to keep from laughing. He bent his knees, and when he touched the dog hoisted him under one arm. The dog's belly was soaking wet.

So they waited, marooned in their consciousness, surrounded by a monstrous tidal space which was slowly, slowly closing them out. In this space the periwinkle beneath the fisherman's boots was king. While hovering airborne in his mind he had an inward glimpse of his house as curiously separate, like a June mirage.

Snow, rocks, seas, wind the fisherman had lived by all his life. Now he thought he had never comprehended what they were, and he hated them. Though they had not changed. He was deadly chilled. He set out to ask the boys if they were cold. There was no sense. He thought of the whiskey, and sidled backward, still holding the awkward dog, till he located the bottle under water with his toe. He picked it up squeamishly as though afraid of getting his sleeve wet, worked his way forward and bent over his son. "Drink it," he said, holding the bottle against the boy's ribs. The boy tipped his head back, drank, coughed hotly, then vomited.

"I can't," he told his father wretchedly.

"Try—try—" the fisherman pleaded, as if it meant the difference between life and death.

The boy obediently drank, and again he vomited hotly. He shook his head against his father's chest and passed the bottle forward to his cousin, who drank and vomited also. Passing the bottle back, the boys dropped it in the frigid water between them.

When the waves reached his knees the fisherman set the warm dog loose and said to his son, "Turn around and get up on my

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shoulders." The boy obeyed. The fisherman opened his oilskin jacket and twisted his hands behind him through his suspenders, clamping the boy's booted ankles with his elbows.

"What about the dog?" the boy asked.

"He'll make his own way all right," the fisherman said. "He can take the cold water." His knees were trembling. Every instinct shrieked for gymnastics. He ground his teeth and braced like a colossus against the sides of the submerged crevice.

The dog, having lived faithfully as though one of them for eleven years, swam a few minutes in and out around the fisherman's legs, not knowing what was happening, and left them without a whimper. He would swim and swim at random by himself, round and round in the blinding night, and when he had swum routinely through the paralyzing water all he could, he would simply, in one incomprehensible moment, drown. Almost the fisherman, waiting out infinity, envied him his pattern.

Freezing seas swept by, flooding inexorably up and up as the earth sank away imperceptibly beneath them. The boy called out once to his cousin. There was no answer. The fisherman, marvelling on a terror without voice, was dumbly glad when the boy did not call again. His own boots were long full of water. With no sensation left in his straddling legs he dared not move them. So long as the seas came sidewise against his hips, and then sidewise against his shoulders, he might balance—no telling how long. The upper half of him was what felt frozen. His legs, disengaged from his nerves and his will, he came to regard quite scientifically. They were the absurd, precarious axis around which reeled and surged universal tumult. The waves would come on and on; he could not visualize how many tossing reinforcements lurked in the night beyond— inexhaustible numbers, and he wept in supernatural fury at each because it was higher, till he transcended hate and took them, swaying like a convert, one by one as they lunged against him and away aimlessly into their own undisputed, wild realm.

From his hips upward the fisherman stretched to his utmost as a man does whose spirit reaches out of dead sleep. The boy's head, none too high, must be at least seven feet above the ledge. Though growing larger every minute, it was a small light life. The fisherman meant to hold it there, if need be, through a thousand tides.

By and by the boy, slumped on the head of his father, asked, "Is it over your boots, Dad?"

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"Not yet," the fisherman said. Then through his teeth he added, "If I fall—kick your boots off—swim for it—downwind—to the island. . . ."

"You . . .?" the boy finally asked.

The fisherman nodded against the boy's belly. "—Won't see each other," he said.

The boy did for the fisherman the greatest thing that can be done. He may have been too young for perfect terror, but he was old enough to know there were things beyond the power of any man. All he could do he did, by trusting his father to do all he could, and asking nothing more.

The fisherman, rocked to his soul by a sea, held his eyes shut upon the interminable night.

"Is it time now?" the boy said.

The fisherman could hardly speak. "Not yet," he said. "Not just yet. . . ."

As the land mass pivoted toward sunlight the day after Christmas, a tiny fleet of small craft converged off shore like iron filings to a magnet. At daybreak they found the skiff floating unscathed off the headland, half full of ducks and snow. The shooting *had* been good, as someone hearing on the nearby mainland the previous afternoon had supposed. Two hours afterward they found the unharmed boat adrift five miles at sea. At high noon they found the fisherman at ebb tide, his right foot jammed cruelly into a glacial crevice of the ledge beside three shotguns, his hands tangled behind him in his suspenders, and under his right elbow a rubber boot with a sock and a live starfish in it. After dragging unlit depths all day for the boys, they towed the fisherman home in his own boat at sundown, and in the frost of evening, mute, laid him on his wharf for his wife to see.

She, somehow, standing on the dock as in her frequent dream, gazing at the fisherman pure as crystal on the icy boards, a small rubber boot still frozen under one clenched arm, saw him exaggerated beyond remorse or grief, absolved of his mortality.

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ANN STANFORD

Hidden Things

1 Upon the wall, drawn by a child's hand,
The horses twitch their tails or clash their hooves
In formal duel in an unreal land.
And they are sealed in stillness, though all moves

About them. No one sees them paw the air
For they are painted over, and no stain
Shows where they fly. Yet certainly they are there.
They are secret as the packet sealed with chain

To the courier's wrist, and even more, for none
Shall read what codes this flying herd might bring.
And so they stretch in their impenetrable zone.

2 Beneath engulfments of ocean, ground, and green

Between the lid of the box and the enclosed
Or the layers of paint or leaf, under sheared surfaces,
The hidden things broaden and are disposed
As rounded bodies in immeasurable space.

As gold beaten to foil may yet endure
Another stroke, and thin and thin again
So does each changing layer yield but more
The wheels and chambers of the finest plane.

No violence attains these inward stores.
Nor the slow fall of stealth, or shifts of day
Complete their rendezvous, although we shower
Echo with roar and labor. Suddenly

We are within the sound that we have made,
Within the box, and mystery surrounds
With vacancies of sun, enclosing shade
Of articulate blue. It is not simple ground

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On which we walk, but treasuries of roots
And stones and hollow chambers, and the slow
Descent of parting things. . . How lonely broods
The orchard, raising the green whispering show

Of summer through the roofs of cottages,
Through lawns and asphalt, in incorrigible tiers,
Remembered seasons, and beyond, in that place,
The waving grass of time's old furniture.

3 What lies beneath the terrace of flesh, the pale
Secluding forehead, in that weir of past
Illusions or hoped events? I cannot tell:
As one walks in darkness past a house

Suffused with radiance, and the curtains pulled,
And curious, waits, discovers there a sum
Of uncovered light and finds within revealed
A shadow passing from the empty room.

But could I go within where dark and gold
Lean close together, hear the voices' tremor,
Still I would be outside each separate world
Illumined by its own conservator.

Alas, poor Psyche, did you think the fire,
The quick uncovering of the lamp would prove
By adding sight, the death of your desire?
You only changed unknown, for loss of, love.

4 Last night, happy and clear, I saw the dead.
We walked together over a wide lawn,
The living not more real than those dear shades,
And leaving to wake, I said farewell again.

Day world of birdsong, when I woke in light
And resonant morning, could any thought distress
This clear existence, paced by breath and bright
Air in which I move? For surfaces

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Are hard, and depth the clean repeating of
The seen. The scene cut through and every leaf the same,
A chord of agate, into which we move,
The immortal hardening of a mortal plane.

Yet in this plain, by every light we sense
We lose as much, slipped back into that bend
Of suffering's waste, unrecollected suns—
Lose, and behold only the figured mind,

The dreamed, annihilable soul, psyche
Beyond the surface of the face, and there
Secretly rest. Where absolute abides
Abide all secret things, in an unbroken care.

The Walnuts

There shine always the bright tops of the grove
And within that forest, mysteries of birds,
In the autumn the clear crackle of leaves
And the walnut pickers. Dark-skirted after them

The gleaners. Trees, trees were everywhere.
Out of the banks of a foggy morning,
Outside the windows, the sweet trees leaned
Tasselled in spring, in holy burst of leaves.

And the oats made meadows of the early year—
With nodes for whistles, the juice sweet and thin—
Grown high to bend into rooms; and yellow flowers
Hung over the spicy tunnels under the trees.

There the grove, hanging forever real in the air.
And I an exile, knowing every turn
And turning home, and lost in the dazzled road
The strange, swept premises, and the great trees gone.

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W. S. MERWIN

The Native

He and his, unwashed all winter,
In that abandoned land in the punished
North, in a gnashing house sunk as a cheek,
Nest together, a bunting bundle crumpled
Like a handkerchief on the croaking
Back-broken bed jacked up in the kitchen; the clock
Soon stops, they just keep the cooker going; all
Kin to begin with when they crawl in under,
Who covers who they don't care.

He and his, in the settled cozy,
Steam like a kettle, rock-a-bye, the best
Went west long ago, got out from under,
Waved bye-bye to the steep scratched fields and scabby
Pastures: their chapped plaster of newspapers
Still chafes from the walls, and snags of string tattling
Of their rugs trail yet from stair-nails. The rest,
Never the loftiest, left to themselves,
Descended, descended.

Most that's his, at the best of times
Looks about to fall: the propped porch lurches
Through a herd of licked machines crutched in their last
Seizures, each as ominously leaning
As the framed ancestors, trapped in their teeth and collars,
Beetling out of oval clouds from the black
Tops of the rooms, their unappeasable jowls
By nothing but frayed, faded cords leashed
To the leaking walls.

But they no more crash
Onto him and his than the cobwebs, or
The gritting rafters, though on the summer-people's
Solid houses the new-nailed shingles open
All over like doors, flap, decamp, the locked

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Shutters peel wide to wag like clappers
At the clattering windows, and the cold chimneys
Scatter bricks downwind, like the smoking heads
Of dandelions.

In his threadbare barn, through
The roof like a snag-toothed graveyard the snow
Cradles and dives onto the pitched backs
Of his cow and plowhorse each thin as hanging
Laundry, and it drifts deep on their spines
So that one beast or other, almost every winter
Lets its knees stiffly down and freezes hard
To the barn floor; but his summer employers
Always buy him others.

For there is no one else
Handy in summer, there in winter,
And he and his can dream at pleasure,
It is said, of houses burning, and do so
All through the cold, till the spooled snakes sleeping under
The stone dairy-floor stir with the turned year,
Waken, and sliding loose in their winter skins
Like air rising through thin ice, reel themselves forth
To inherit the earth.

ISABELLA GARDNER

Letter from Slough Pond

Here where you left me alone
the soft wind sighs through my wishbone
the sun is lapping at my flesh
I couple with the ripples of the fresh
pond water I am rolled by the roiling sea.
Love, in our wide bed, do you lie lonely?
The spoon of longing stirs my marrow
And I thank God this bed is narrow.

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WINTHROP PALMER

Manhattan Island, 1957

Erect and immediate a line of march,
Encampment. The field of water smiles ahead,
Behind? Four centuries of aching search,
Of settlement elsewhere, of solitude
And now return, company by company,
To that first landing place, the battle won.
What paraclete, what ancestor stands by
To interview the dead, to nod well done?
What ample voices thunder a salute,
What girls approach?
The forest has turned to stone.
The clouds scream hour by hour "pass."
Bomb-proof helmets carry about the city
A goddess, breasted with aluminum,
Sheathed in a tight skin of sultry glass.

Demigods

His knee a piston, his mouth a horn
Teenage the satyr salutes the sun
At the beach, his mattress, in the park, his grove,
On the road, his rival, with his records of love.

Hair cropped, her bright legs bare
A girl stands still. Was the chase here?
The river screams, the city replies
Like Argus with a thousand eyes.

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KENNETH B. SAWYER

Art Chronicle: Sculpture in America

RECENTLY, AN ABLE YOUNG ENGLISH CRITIC visiting the United States for the first time asked me to compile for him a list of artists whose work I thought of particular interest. Completing the task, I was struck by the dearth of sculptors for whom I could muster any genuine enthusiasm. This, against the columns of painters who seemed to me "advanced" and making, or preparing to make, individual contributions to the art of this century, was a greater imbalance than I had supposed existed (since the Renaissance the ratio of painters to sculptors has been consistently greater), and a curious one given the enormous range of materials and tools with which it is possible to develop the ideas of third-dimensional art.

Perhaps a partial answer lies in America's failure to produce a substantial body of cubist work. Arriving in New York after the vitality of its initial impulse was exhausted in Europe, cubism was thus discredited by the avant-garde before it was well begun (although recently it has had a tentative revival). Few sculptors on this side of the Atlantic were willing or prepared to risk the already academic exercises of cubism to wrest from it the viable esthetic that was its foundation (David Smith was an exception, but, then, he usually is). Surrealism provided a solution for the painters, particularly the surrealism of Miró, with its lack of illusionistic space and its loosed composition, but this, obviously, provided little comfort to the sculptors. There remained the monstrous, architectonic images of Ernst, Chirico, Tanguy, and Dali, which were technically academic, or Bauhaus design, which had already begun to take its place in the vocabulary of mass media. While the painters were able to press beyond the literary apparatuses of surrealism without relinquishing its technical assets, the sculptors—or so it seems in retrospect—were left in very much the same position as they had been in the late nineteenth century. A number of them are still arrested there.

For a time it seemed that Theodore Roszak would provide an alternative for the powerful precedent of cubism and Gonzalez. While strictly speaking no innovator, Roszak attacked the new materials of sculpture in a highly personal way—a way more strictly sculptural than Gonzalez', and more flexible than that of the cubists. Working with a simple, generally unarticulated image of welded or hammered steel, he superimposes a crust, often resembling cooled lava, of brazed metal much like the paint surfaces of Ernst in the thirties. The brazed passages, chemic rather than organic, suggest matter in flux; one always has the uneasy sense that a Roszak sculpture may at any time writhe into its antonymic shape.

If Roszak's craft is solid, his means and range are limited. Apparently unwilling to adapt the brazing techniques, with which his name has been so closely associated, to the freer, articulated space design of several of his contemporaries, he is left with the problem of discovering fresh variations

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on his basically surrealist image. In the more recent work there is a straining after effects, an attempt to pump vitality and drama into forms uninteresting because overfamiliar. This indicates, I think, a growing awareness of the limitations of his means and the struggle to overcome them on his own terms. Roszak's ambitions, clearly indicated in the work of the forties, remain unrealized. If he fulfills them, it will be by modifying surrealism where he is now stopped.

Seymour Lipton, too, finds his sources in surrealism, but his animus is vegetal rather than mineral. Lest this remark be taken as facetious, let me add that I find Lipton, more than any sculptor working in metal today, in the direct line of descent from Gaudi. Like Gaudi, he makes impossible demands on his material (steel, brazed with nickel-silver, bronze, etc.); what is surprising is his ratio of success. Not that this is an unequivocal good: often in the past he has overblown his content into something very close to absurdity, imposing element on element until, like the fabled toad, it has burst from its own aspiration. While Lipton has worked large occasionally, he has, I think, failed to provide conceptual material to fit the scale. In the most recent "Americans" show at the Museum of Modern Art, the twenty-eight by thirty-three inch "Jungle Bloom" seemed to me a far more realized piece than the eight foot "The Cloak," which, despite its attempt at variations on a theme, was distinguished only by its size.

If in the past Lipton has tended to puff his manner beyond the scope of his matter, his recent sculpture has turned toward a simplicity of form, toward a finer ambiguity of relationships. The folds of textured steel that encase menacing emptiness are less obviously resolved into volutes or declining rhythms, as if Lipton, finally satisfied with his command of the medium, has set aside virtuosity for a deeper, perhaps more personal expression. More important, I think, is his growing sense of the epic in sculpture. The 1957 "Pioneer," his largest piece in the recent Venice Biennale (where he shared the American Pavillion with Rothko, Smith, and Tobey), indicated a growing confidence in quiet statement. It sustained a dignity I formerly missed in Lipton's sculpture. Its addition may one day locate him in the first rank of American sculptors.

In the December, 1954 issue of *Art in America*, Herbert Ferber wrote:

> Monolithic sculpture, centripetal sculpture, possessed by the idea of mass, presents a continuous surface, enclosing a volume, which is motivated from the center. Sculpture of extension, centrifugal sculpture is neither massive nor monolithic, nor does it present a continuous surface. Its elements are not oriented to a center nor are they projections from a central mass. Where sculpture had been solid, closed, it is now an art of open, airy, discontinuous forms, suspended in space.

I quote this paragraph in full not because of its originality, but because it expresses concisely an attitude that has become increasingly common since Gonzalez, an attitude that is predominant among at least a segment of avant-garde sculptors both here and abroad. Implicitly, it would result

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in sculpture as a kind of drawing in space—which is, in much of Ferber's work, precisely what it does result in.

In rejecting both carving and modeling, Ferber has removed himself from an ancient tradition to become a partisan of a newer, and presently more vigorous one—that of Gonzalez and Smith. He brings to it a more obviously bravura technique than either. I say *obviously* because both go far beyond him in range and means, but Ferber—I suppose one would describe his sensibility as Baroque—like Lipton succumbs to opulence more frequently. Recently he abandoned the leaden surfaces of his earlier pieces, I think to the detriment of his style. The new elegance distracts the eye from the real problem he is attacking: that of space divided into units of dialectical tension. Like Smith, he is often masterful when marshalling space into configurations of pure energy; unlike Smith, he sometimes loses his nerve when confronted by authentic creation. The temptation to prettify is great; when he resists it he is an artist of strength and authority.

Prettiness is seldom a problem with David Hare. The raw, welded surfaces which are the invariables of his sculpture are forthright enough, and even the characteristic delicacy stays odd and unprecious. Hare began as a carver. The small wood torsos of about fifteen years ago seem at first surprising in light of his later development. They are frontal as antique Apollos, and refined to a series of soft, evocative planes that baffle the eye rather than beckon it. It is centripetal sculpture, sculpture of density and weight; and it relates to the later steel work with a curious consistency of concept. If this seems a paradox in view of Hare's evident attraction to fragile, slender forms and spidery constructions, it can be resolved with a further glance at such pieces as the 1950-51 "Juggler," and the 1955 "Figure in a Window." Both are concerned with density and volume, but the vocabulary of this concern has become ambiguous. In "Juggler," density is implied in the cage-like structure which also functions as a base, in the obliquely placed arcs and spheres of the figure itself. In "Figure in a Window," Hare has carried the implicative mode a step further by describing his volumes almost totally in line. It is a trick he may have learned from Smith in the forties (I know of no direct metal sculptor who hasn't learned from Smith), but Hare has digested it well, pushed it to personal conclusions. At worst, Hare is dogged by a certain artiness that expresses itself in lacy filligrees which seem to me simply virtuoso stunts; at best, he projects a whiplash energy at once fine and stinging.

At first I was put off by what I took to be Louise Nevelson's lack of range. The charred cathedrals or midnight cities of her imagination seemed less products of style than of stylization. It was just a year ago that I had a first inkling of pleasure from her constructions. One of her pieces was included in a Kline show at the HCE Gallery in Provincetown, and in that conjunction she emerged as an original and forceful artist, quite prepared to hold her own in any company. Perhaps her wood functioned well among the Klines by contrast: she is one of the few vanguard sculptors in America who isn't concerned with drawing in space. Her black,

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tense cities occupy virtual space precisely as Kline's calligraphs occupy illusionistic space. The matte articulations relate formally, but coincidentally. In her exhibition at Grand Central Moderns last season, I had a broader view of what she was attempting. Her sculpture, when seen in a body, becomes enveloping atmosphere in the sense that Rothko's painting envelops. While wall sculpture—relief—is an important part of her repertoire, it remains sculpture, with the literal projections and recessions in space that are a part of its total impact. Her "walls," composed of relief elements joined, are Gothic in impulse and effect. Taken individually, these small reliefs have the effect of Spanish crossroads shrines. Miss Nevelson's woods, carved and found, are simple and subtle; they are not grand manner stuff. At best, they are more immediate than that.

A European reputation has come to be something of a liability to American artists, particularly if the artist in question has never adequately been represented in the United States. The highly praised Paris product is usually a handsome article, facile and well-made, with all the staying power of an ice cube. It may have its charm for Westchester, but Tenth Street has learned to regard it with suspicion. There has been considerable —not absolute—justification for this attitude, and when it has been assumed dogmatically we have been the losers. Claire Falkenstein has, I think, been an extreme victim of this attitude. There is no reason to pretend that her sculpture does not present difficulties; indeed, she generally outdistances even those most prone to be sympathetic with each new developmental period. Her very genuine originality is an initial barrier. I know of no sculptor today less dependent on current conventions than Miss Falkenstein.

A native of Coos Bay, Oregon, Claire Falkenstein was closely associated with the post-war developments in San Francisco. A graduate of the University of California in Berkeley, she taught at Mills College and the California School of Fine Arts. Her exhibitions were limited to the Bay Region, with the exception of single pieces included in group shows in Chicago and New York. In the early fifties she settled in Paris, and there produced a body of work so far as I know unprecedented in recent sculpture. Miss Falkenstein's range is formidable: she carves, models, casts, forges, welds, brazes, and constructs. Her oils, collages, and graphics are as remarkable for their originality as her sculpture. In no sense can her versatility be interpreted as dilletantism: she is one of the few artists today who is capable of sustaining the Renaissance conception of the complete artificer, which is perhaps the reason her collaboration is much in demand among European architects (her gate for la Principessa Pignatelli's seaside villa seems to me an unequivocal masterpiece).

Miss Falkenstein's most serious concern is for forged and brazed metal, particularly a series she has called "*soleils*." The title is justified. Constructed of iron and copper wire brazed with brass, silver, and fused glass, these sculptures, usually distorted globular forms, seem to breathe a fiery effluvium. The wires are skeined and welded in such a fashion as to imply both mass and light, with close attention to the space harmonics of the

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interstices. The gold and silver tones of the brass and silver, and the iridescence of the glass augment the feeling of inner light, without the trumpery elegance of a Lippold construction. While Miss Falkenstein's influence on recent French sculpture has been marked, New York has yet to witness her first one-man show. When it does, perhaps the measure of her achievement will be properly assessed.

David Smith at first seemed destined to suffer the fate of Gonzalez: programmatic indifference from the museums, neglect from the collectors, enthusiasm from fellow artists and a few intrepid critics (Clement Greenberg was among the first to single out his work), then posthumous praise and beatification by the shamans of high culture. The middle forties, and the English "Renaissance," prompted by Henry Moore and his apologist Herbert Read, turned our eyes again to sculpture. Casting about for examples of the indigenous product to support our claims to esthetic maturity, we discovered instead the truth of our poverty. Out of the welter of regional proselytes, social realists, neoconstructivists, and commission portraitists, only Calder could conceivably be regarded as a living American master. It is not my intent to attack Calder; within his range, which is limited, he is one of the most original sculptors of the twentieth century. But it is precisely those limitations that preclude majority.

It was about this time that Smith began to attract attention. His apprenticeship was in painting, and in several of his best known sculptures—"Hudson River Landscape," "The Banquet," "Australia"—the approach is painterly in the sense that the problem of spatial arrangement is solved two-dimensionally. This does not lessen their impact; they are extremely successful, and their terms are stated from the outset, as, for example, Jackson Pollock's paintings of 1949-50 stated theirs. These are sculptures to be seen *through*, and they are related, at least philosophically, to Moholy's space modulators in so far as they transmute the fraction of a world we view through them. In this, they aspire beyond Gonzalez' aerial sketches in both impulse and achievement. For while the trajectories of Gonzalez' linear pieces activate their immediate atmosphere, Smith's attack a broader vista, surrounding, enclosing it, and finally restating it in the language of controlled space. But the presence of Gonzalez, and of Picasso, can be sensed in the early Smith. He has stated that, as a painter, he felt compelled to build his surfaces into relief. The forgings of Picasso and Gonzalez, which he saw in reproduction in the thirties, liberated him from the canvas; his own background—as an industrial worker—confirmed the means.

His first attempts at iron sculpture—remarkably successful ones—were with equipment borrowed from a garage in Bolton's Landing, New York. Later, he worked in quarters furnished him by the proprietors of the Terminal Iron Works in Brooklyn, one of whom he celebrated in "Blackburn—Song of an Irish Blacksmith." From the beginnings of his sculpture, Smith was in the main current of western art (a current that he was later to help change and direct). I do not mean to ascribe to him a more than natural response to French art; Smith was unique among his contempor-

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aries in the degree that he was able to assimilate, to digest it. The musicians of the middle forties prove at once his debt to Picasso, and the manner in which he had set about paying it. It is not, I think, overstatement to insist that he was the only American sculptor to contribute to cubism while making use of it.

While Miró's surrealism was a feasible alternative to cubism for painters, it had little to teach the sculptor. Smith's surrealist work returned him to that middle ground between painting and sculpture, relief (the "Medals for Dishonor"), or to the predatory image ("Royal Bird"). With characteristic independence, Smith used surrealism only in so far as it coincided with his personal evolution. In those essays are to be found a technical elegance that he maintains to this day when he projects that steely detachment that attends some of his strongest work. Smith's elegance is neither effeminate nor frivolous; it is the elegance of a well-built locomotive, with each part spare and functioning. But it would be a mistake to attempt to locate his art in any school or period. He has taken what he required from the world of art and the world of nature, never failing to translate it into an achievement both vigorous and personal. His refusal to remain fixed in a single style has driven him to his failures. I am referring to his forgings done in 1955-56. These slender verticals, with their perforations and their faint rhythms were disappointing in their austerity; they revealed an attempt to reduce sculpture beyond the permissible limits. They were uncharacteristic of Smith, whose impulses are normally additive, and, as if acknowledging their failure, he quickly embarked on a series of large standing figures more complex than anything he had previously undertaken. In them, he has achieved the truly heroic. Smith is one of the four or five unmistakable geniuses of the American twentieth century. He is, I think, the greatest sculptor the New World has yet produced.

One man—even a man of genius—does not make a Renaissance. The poverty of American sculpture during the past two decades is doubly perplexing in view of the wealth of American painting. Nor can standards of judgment fail to suffer from the presence each season of the flashier importations from abroad, which, incidentally, continue to find their way into public collections. Officialdom, on civic, state, and national levels, persists in its conviction that monuments mean statuary of a particularly degraded and offensive kind, and architects, traditionally the champions of sculpture in the great ages of the past, seem today singularly reluctant to share their credits and commissions.[1] The situation of sculpture in America today is analogous to that of painting in the twenties. Given the conditions under which it subsists, it is astonishing that it persists with such obstinacy as an art form. Perhaps that very obstinacy is the best encouragement we can hope for.

[1] This is probably unjust. Mr. Samuel M. Kootz tells me that every sculptor who exhibits in his gallery is, or has been in the recent past, engaged in architectural commissions.

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B. H. HAGGIN

Ballet and Opera Chronicle

THE NEW YORK BALLET SEASON was opened early in September by the New York City Ballet's four-week presentation of works from last year's repertory—except for one new pas de deux—with changes in personnel that brought interesting new performances in old roles, and consequent changes in the character and effectiveness of the ballets. In particular, in the temporary absence of Maria Tallchief and Diana Adams for the entire period, and of Melissa Hayden for a few days, some of their roles were taken over by young Allegra Kent, who in recent seasons has compelled fascinated attention with the exquisitely fluid continuity of her movements, their clarity and exactness, and the personal radiance and force she has projected. In the first *Swan Lake* I saw, at the beginning of the third week, her dancing in the big adagio didn't yet flow with clear and continuous definition, and she didn't dance the later solo at all; moreover the corps, with several new members, exhibited its insecurity in a couple of collisions. But already in the *Swan Lake* I saw at the end of that week, Kent's dancing—not only in the adagio but in the later solo that she included this time—had settled into a clearly outlined continuous form; and what now remained for it to acquire through repetition was an amplitude in the filling out of time with movement that would give the performance an additional largeness and grandeur of style.

On the other hand, literal physical largeness was what the movements of the Pas de Deux of *Agon*, created for long-limbed Diana Adams, did not have when they were executed by Kent who is very small; and the effect was that of an impressively accomplished doing of the enormously difficult movements, as against the cool, good-humored disposing of them by Adams with her longer legs and arms. And in *Stars and Stripes* too, Kent with her physical smallness didn't achieve the hammy effect that Hayden achieves in her exaggeratedly showy pas de deux with D'Amboise.

The largeness and grandeur of style I referred to were something Kent also needed to acquire in the series of arabesques in the second movement of *Symphony in C;* but the opening and closing sections of the movement call for precisely the lyrical flow that she made so lovely. And most impressive was her Terpischore in *Apollo*, with its every exquisite bodily configuration in pose and movement completely and enchantingly achieved.

Kent was not the only young dancer whom it was exciting to watch in new roles. The departure of Robert Barnett resulted in the moving up of the outstandingly gifted Edward Villella into Barnett's roles in the third movements of *Symphony in C* and *Western Symphony* and the second "campaign" of *Stars and Stripes*. In these he didn't exhibit Barnett's personal spectacular style, but he did leap, spin and soar with his own technical precision and brilliance, fluent grace and superb elevation. In *The Four Temperaments*, on the other hand, the Melancholic Variation, with Herbert

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Bliss gone, was danced by Richard Rapp, who didn't, these first times, fill it out with the expansiveness and weight of Bliss's movements.

As for the new pas de deux, *Waltz Scherzo* to music of Tchaikovsky—which Balanchine offered in place of the originally announced *Secret Canon* to music of Hindemith—it was unusual in its employment of the virtuosity of Patricia Wilde and Andre Eglevsky in movements that were kept charmingly delicate and low-keyed.

It is the new, chiefly, that I report here; but I must mention the old that struck me with new force: Todd Bolender's Phlegmatic Variation in *The Four Temperaments*, his solo and his dancing with the girls in the first Pas de Trois of *Agon*, Melissa Hayden's solo in the second Pas de Trois of *Agon*, Francisco Moncion's first scene in *Orpheus*—each achieved so economically, so exactly, so completely, with such witty or powerful effect. But concerning the old I must add that the hamming of the first scene of *Bourrée Fantasque* was even worse than before. And I must mention also that in *Square Dance* the appalling words of the caller—often with no descriptive relation to the movements—again were blared out by the loud-speakers and constituted a distracting intrusion.

For the rest, though the changes in the company not only caused revision of announced programs and cancellation of several announced works but also had an unsettling effect on the earlier performances—exemplified by the collisions in *Swan Lake*—the later performances exhibited the company's restored security and stability.

I recall such security and stability in the American Ballet Theatre's early years, when it presented the classical repertory with Alicia Markova, operating in full exercise of her powers, as the prima ballerina who set style and tone for the company, and when it had Antony Tudor watching over the works he contributed to the modern repertory; I also recall a measure of such security and stability in the later years when Alicia Alonso and Igor Youskevitch were the company's first classical dancers. In the years since their departure it has had the outstanding classical *danseur noble* of today, young Erik Bruhn; but the moments of splendor he has contributed haven't effaced the general impression of confusion and deterioration: in September, for example, the second *Giselle* had, with Bruhn, Markova in a guest appearance in the title role; but the first *Giselle* had the dancer who, incredibly, ranks at present as the company's prima ballerina and dances the title role regularly—Nora Kaye. A *Nutcracker* pas de deux that I saw had Bruhn dancing with the highly accomplished, if somewhat flashy, Violette Verdy; but a *Black Swan* pas de deux had him dancing with Kaye. And the two performances of Balanchine's *Theme and Variations* I saw had not Bruhn but the less brilliant Royes Fernandez, and not Verdy but Lupe Serrano, who danced with bold strength but no fluidity and grace—the result being that the piece which used to be dazzling was now drab.

Deterioration was evident in some other fine ballets of the company's repertory that I saw (I didn't see everything it presented). In Eugene Loring's *Billy the Kid* John Kriza's lessened technical security and precision

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mattered less than changes in the choreography which called for corrective restatement of the piece by its creator; and much greater need of such revision was exhibited by Jerome Robbins' *Fancy Free*, which now made its points with a sledgehammer. In Anton Dolin's *Pas de Quatre*, too, the little strokes of delicate humor were now magnified and heavy; and Markova, who made one of her guest appearances in this piece, contributed to the overemphasis with the exaggerated primness of her Mme. Taglioni.

This was only part of the change in Markova's dancing since the first years of the Ballet Theatre. In 1945, when she returned to the company after a year in a Billy Rose show, her dancing, though still wonderfully beautiful, began to exhibit a reduction in physical scale and intensity; as this economizing in effort continued, her performances gradually were reduced to miniatures of what they had been; and in her prim little upward leaps in *Pas de Quatre* this time her feet barely left the floor. Having said this I must add that there still were moments—when, for example, she came to rest in an arabesque—which took one's breath away with the deployment and configuration of her body in movement and pose.

In *Giselle* too, this time, her dancing in the early scenes—e.g. the skips about the stage which were as short in trajectory and as close to the floor as they could be made—exhibited a saving of effort for the big movements later that could not be reduced—in particular those of the second act, which again were breathtaking in their unique beauty, produced by what Edwin Denby once described as her control of "the full continuity of a motion from the center to the extremities" and her "instinct for the melody of movement as it deploys and subsides in the silence of time." With Markova's dancing; with dancing by Bruhn that was sensational in its unstraining technical brilliance and its elegance; with Eugene Berman's distinguished setting and costumes—the black tulle over white and the green showing underneath, of the Willis' costumes—this second act of *Giselle* was the one instance in which the company attained greatness.

As for the four new ballets I saw (of the six that were presented), two, *Concerto* and *Paean*, were by Herbert Ross, who several years ago gave the company a stunning piece, *Caprichos*, but since then has produced nothing of value or interest. *Concerto*, to Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto, carried its boring imitation of Russian-peasant ballets to excruciating lengths; whereas *Paean*, to Chausson's Concerto for Violin, Piano and Strings, bored one with its straining, pointless ingenuity, as did Kenneth MacMillan's *Journey*, to Bartok's Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta. As for Birgit Cullberg's *Miss Julie*, to music by Ture Rangstrom, it is one of the narrative ballets whose movements have little interest beyond the story they tell; and in this instance the recital of some of the incidents of Strindberg's *Miss Julie* conveyed nothing of the real substance of this subtly intellectual play.

If the Ballet Theatre had wanted to get Jerome Robbins to revise *Fancy Free* it would presumably have found him, in September, at the Alvin Theatre keeping his eye on his own production, *Ballets: U. S. A.* Two pieces on this program, *Afternoon of a Faun* and *The Concert*, had been

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done previously by the New York City Ballet; one, *N. Y. Export, Op. Jazz,* had been created for last summer's Festival of Two Worlds in Spoleto and was now receiving its first American performances (I was told that it was a reworking of material in *West Side Story*, which I had not seen); and *3X3* was a new curtain-raiser.

Afternoon of a Faun and *The Concert* are two pieces in the series—beginning with *Fancy Free* and continuing chiefly with the Mack Sennett ballet of *High Button Shoes* and the other humorous ballets for musical shows—in which Robbins' impressive powers as a choreographer have served the perceptive mind and eye of a master of comedy. The *Faun* piece is an amusing embodiment—in dance terms keyed, in their delicacy, to the scale and tone of Debussy's music—of a wry observation about the people of the world bounded by the walls and mirrors of the dance studio: each movement which begins as personal involvement ends with the dancers turning toward the mirror to see how they look. *The Concert* is a series of revue sketches representing the reveries of people listening to a number of pieces by Chopin—some of the sketches achieving their effect with dancing, and others not. A girl in a big floppy hat makes a high-stepping entrance on points to seat herself near the piano and gaze soulfully at the pianist; later she remains seated in the same soulful attitude when her chair is removed; later she joins some boys in a wild burlesque mazurka; later she tries on a series of ridiculous hats and chooses one joyfully, only to be crushed by meeting someone else with the same hat; somewhere in between a group of girls wreck a Balanchine-style ensemble with their mistakes; and so on.

At the same time that Robbins has produced his comedies he has created ballets embodying his serious thoughts about the world—*Facsimile* and *The Age of Anxiety*, about lonely people; *The Guests*, about social snobbery; *The Cage*, about the lethal behaviour of insect-like females to males—of which the first two exhibited personal privacies that were embarrassing to look at, and the other two said their say in movements that achieved nothing beyond their uninteresting or unpleasant meaning. Now comes *N. Y. Export, Op. Jazz,* prefaced by the statement in the program that our teenagers—feeling themselves "a minority group in this threatening and explosive world into which they have been born," and therefore feeling a strong emotional kinship with the minority groups, Negro and Latin-American, who have made the major and basic contribution to American popular dancing—"have so identified with the dynamics, kinetic impetus, the drives and 'coolness' of today's jazz steps that these dances have become an expression of our youth's outlook and their attitudes toward the contemporary world around them." But it is only in the final section of *N. Y. Export* that the teenagers express their outlook and attitudes merely by dancing the dances that supposedly express their outlook and attitudes: in the earlier sections the expressing is done by "a formal, abstract ballet based on the kinds of movements, complexities of rhythms, expressions of relationships and qualities of atmospheres found in today's dances"—this being exemplified by the

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group of teenagers with arms extended heavenward in yearning, in the photograph on the program cover. For me a group of teenagers with arms extended heavenward has no relation either to the realities of teenagers' dancing or to any other realities in their lives; and I found the mere dancing at the end enormously exciting, but was left uninvolved by the earlier formal, abstract ballet based on this dancing.

As for *3X3*, it testified to Robbins' further gift for the excessively arch.

The opera season also began at the City Center, with the New York City Opera Company's uneven performances of an ambitiously heterogeneous and poorly chosen group of works. In addition to a few operas of the standard repertory, it included two operettas, *Die Fledermaus* and *The Merry Widow*, sung in English—the kind of work an American opera company shouldn't perform, and least of all perform in English; repetitions of two American operas, Carlisle Floyd's fluently unoriginal *Susannah* and Douglas Moore's feeble *Ballad of Baby Doe*, which didn't deserve even their first performances; repetitions of last year's *Abduction from the Seraglio* of Mozart, which deserved a better production than it got last year, and *Turandot* of Puccini, which is rubbish that should be left unheard; and as novelties a revival of the company's delightful production of Rossini's *Cenerentola*, a masterpiece of its genre, and new productions of Richard Strauss's *Die schweigsame Frau*, in English as *The Silent Wife*, which had never been performed in this country, and Benjamin Britten's *Rape of Lucretia*, which was given on Broadway about ten years ago.

The Strauss and Britten operas are alike in being—each in its own way—a resourceful craftsman's mere pretense at writing music (one can understand Stravinsky's savage contempt for Strauss—the contempt of a man whose every note represented an attentive, purposeful act in the seeking of constantly fresh utterance, for a man who allowed mere facile technical virtuosity to go on repeating the same empty tonal luxuriance mechanically and endlessly). Having said that, I must add that the Strauss pretense comes off more plausibly than the Britten, producing stretches of the Straussian sugary tunefulness in addition to the stretches of arid parlando; though when Strauss is called on for something more adequate than mere tunefulness for Sir Morosus' thoughts on old age, he can produce only a pretense that fails here as it does in the Princess' similar first-act monologue in *Der Rosenkavalier*. And one can say also that there was some justification for expending talent and work and money on a production of *The Silent Woman*, an opera by an eminent composer which had never been heard in this country; whereas there was no such justification for wasting them on *The Rape of Lucretia*, which had sufficiently demonstrated its worthlessness to the New York public ten years ago.

The production of *The Silent Woman* was excellent, with good scenery and costumes by Andreas Nomikos, effective staging by Margaret Webster, efficient conducting by Peter Herman Adler, and a cast with one outstanding singing actor, Paul Ukena, and several other singers—John Alexander, Leon Lishner, Joan Carroll—who were very good. It takes

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talent of an awesome kind to conduct singers and orchestra through the maze of a Strauss opera after only a few rehearsals; but evidently it takes more or a different kind of talent to deal adequately with the simple, transparent textures of Mozart; for Adler, who had got the orchestra to produce a rich-sounding impasto with the thick profusion of notes in *The Silent Woman*, couldn't get anything better from it than dry, drab sounds in plodding phrases without saliency of outline in *The Abduction from the Seraglio*. Adding to the dispiriting character of the occasion was some of the singing: the performance had an excellent Constanza in Phyllis Curtin, an acceptable Blonda in Jacquelynne Moody, a good Pedrillo in David Lloyd, but a painfully dry- and tight-voiced Belmonte in George Maran, and an inadequate Osmin in Leon Lishner. And it offered a cut-down and rearranged version of the opera (with major arias of Constanza and Belmonte omitted) of the kind that Adler has put together for some of his NBC Television Theatre productions.

What appeared to be the talent required to conduct Mozart was excitingly evident in the performance of *La Cenerentola* presided over by the young Italian conductor Arturo Basile with the poised control, the flexibility governed by an unfailing plastic sense, that had made his pacing and shaping of Verdi's *Macbeth* so impressive the year before, and that now produced a precisely integrated progression of playing and singing which flowed with lightness, elasticity, grace, clarity of outline, continuity of tension, and stylistic brilliance and verve. With, in addition, Rouben Ter-Arutunian's charming scenery and costumes, Michael Pollock's amusingly inventive stage direction (except for an occasional overdoing of a good thing), the admirable vocal and dramatic performances of Frances Bible, John Reardon, Jacquelynne Moody, Regina Sarfaty, Ralph Herbert and George Baratti, this was one of the outstanding presentations of opera in New York in recent years.

The American Opera Society began with Bellini's *I Capuletti ed I Montecchi*, a work unfamiliar to the American public except for one aria recorded by Giulietta Simionato, who sang in this performance. It exhibits the gift for large structures of elegantly impassioned melody that the public has come to know in Bellini's other operas; and the beauty of Simionato's voice throughout its extraordinary range, the grand style and expressive power of her phrasing, the projective force of her singing, added up to a vocal performance of tremendous impact that overshadowed the lovely singing of Laurel Hurley.

One of the most beautiful of Bellini's melodic structures, the aria "*Qui la voce*" in *I Puritani*, was sung at a Carnegie Hall recital by Eleanor Steber, who in this piece, and in an opening Mozart group—the *Alleluia* from *Exsultate, Jubilate*, the "*Zeffiretti lusinghieri*" from *Idomeneo* and the "*Martern aller Arten*" from *The Abduction*—also demonstrated notable beauty of voice, expressive power of phrasing, and grandeur of style, to say nothing of the flexibility of the big voice and its accuracy in coloratura passages. With, in addition, the performances of five of the six songs of Berlioz' *Nuits d'été*, the occasion offered some of the great singing of our day.

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VERNON YOUNG

Letter from 'Scandinavia'

IF YOU TIME IT CAREFULLY, or if you're lucky, as I was—your first view of Europe by the Nordic route—except for a distant phantom resembling an iceberg which, you were informed, was an Orkney island—your first *closeup* view, let's say, can be "Hamlet's castle" at Elsinore. Shortly after dawn, perhaps. That's when I saw it, on a clear morning, with nothing ghostly-Medieval or ambiguous in the atmosphere. Elsinore, beside being a summer resort within convenient distance from Copenhagen, is also the place where your ship is boarded by the passport-control gentry. In view of so official a reminder and of the visible fact that Kronborg Castle, itself, appears more palatial than rugged and is hemmed, furthermore, by thriving shipyards, it's difficult to retain the notion that here is a symbol of European Man characterized by doubt. None the less, and even with the knowledge that Amleth was a native of Jutland, Denmark's peninsula, not of Sjaeland where Shakespeare placed him, the myth remains, three hundred and fifty years old, and compelling. Returning to Kronborg under a wintry sky, you may find the surroundings fully appropriate; the white swans in the moat will seem captive princesses, and their attendant brown ducklings the drab issue of their disdain for a pragmatic society. By then you will have altered your conclusions on Denmark a number of times and you can celebrate your ambivalence in the correctly oppressive milieu.

Most European countries lend themselves to paradox by virtue of the obvious phenomenon, cultural lag: the psychological contradiction reflected in the associative remnants of the Past, aesthetically rich for the most part, standing at odds with the ill-digested (usually) technology of the Recent. Denmark, no exception, may seem paradoxical out of juxtaposition, merely—an automotive welfare state with inordinately sculptured dragons at its back, and on its rooftops—whereas England and Sweden, for example, are genuinely schizophrenic. This, at any rate, is one's first conclusion. The Dane has no basic problem, you tell yourself. He has what he wants: social security—which is to say liberal benefits for old age and motherhood, socialized medicine, a stabilized control of housing (too stabilized for citizens inclined to mobility), rigorously observed closing hours, vending machines for the cigarettes, cheese or can-opener he fails to procure before Saturday noon—and a system of modest sponsorship, tax-borne, for a movie industry which scarcely exists. The Dane has a stubborn respect for fact, displayed no less in his flair for compiling statistics than in such instances as his rewriting of the text in his edition of *Life* magazine's *The World We Live In* because he found it not only scientifically presumptive but also, in respect to its few metaphysical reservations, unwarranted. With no theatre of his own, to speak of, and no painting (to be looked at), he has a seriously informed respect for art and

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letters. He is bored by Swedish introspection and divided between contempt for and emulation of American merchandising. *Politiken*, his leading newspaper, was once an intellectual leader, intransigent and unshackled; it remains a highly articulate organ of opinion but its editors now analyze, with a view to anticipating, the reactions of their 2 million daily readers (in a population total of 5 million!). Certainly—or none the less—the intellectual level of the Danish reader must be remarkable if one accepts a half-dozen of his newspapers as a significant index. Each of them pays daily attention to the life of the mind and it is not unusual to find a detailed interview with a celebrity, of literature or science, taking up the entire front page and continuing over-leaf, amplified by local debate and speculation.

Nowhere, except in France, perhaps, is the critical temper so manifest. True, there is far less room than in France for interpretative fancy (either of art or of politics?): by the same token there are fewer opportunities for humbug. If, as Georges Bernanos has said, "At twenty the poet is always right; at sixty the doctor is never wrong," I'd prefer to be sixty in Denmark. For I have unlimited confidence in its doctors and I am impertinent enough to infer that the poets, whom I can't read, aren't worth reading—excepting, of course, "Isak Dinesen" (Baroness Blixen), who writes profoundly poetic stories in both English and Danish. The Baroness is an anachronism to be reckoned with. Besides Soren Kierkegaard and that pastry-chef, Hans Christian Andersen, she is the only Danish writer to enjoy international repute, a circumstance from which the contemporary Dane, progressive in spirit, derives as much embarrassment as pleasure, since he is foe to the whole complex of agrarian feudalism, fantasy and non-clinical psychology which provides her assumptions. The Danish predicament was amusingly exemplified in the reviews which greeted her latest book: she was generally approved by Liberals and scolded by Conservatives. Presumably two orders of guilt were at work here—and it is not unimportant to note that the only serious consideration of her fiction as cinematically potential has been given by Alf Sjoberg, Sweden's masterful director of *Hets* ("Torment") and *Froken Julie*, who has permission, if anyone will underwrite it, to film the Baroness' quintessential short story, "Sorrow-Acre."

The Danes are realistic—one sums it up. Yet sooner or later you encounter the manic subject concerning which there are so many suppositions you abandon your own as premature: the exceptionally high suicide rate in a population which gives every appearance of being immune to excess in any form save the textures of their pastry. Somewhere lurks a disparity; somewhere—between the dragons and the vending machines—there lies an invisible anxiety; somewhere between the rural and the urban spirit (my guess) there has been an inadequate transition. Landscape and city, in so far as Copenhagen represents the dominant urban concentration, convey a discontinuous personality. Copenhagen is bustling, neon-eyed and bushy-tailed—whereas the countryside is muted and subtly mournful. In autumn, the season of my first notations, the land outside Copenhagen

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has a uniquely toned sadness as the fog seeps through the elegant free-standing thickets of russet and black trees, turning shadows to inky-blue. Moss attaches itself everywhere and the more slender trees, thus green-burdened, look like vegetable stalks or undersea plants. Fallen beech leaves, when undisturbed by wind, settle in deep burnished pools at the feet of the giants, seeming to reflect the overhead foliage. The presence of trolls is more credible than in the evergreen landscapes of Norway and Sweden. Farther off and later on, when powdered by snow, the farm country of Jutland ripples gently in graduated contours that harmonize perfectly with the soft conte-crayon profiles of thatched roofs. But Copenhagen, unless snow-encrusted, becomes an unattractive wet mess, like a scrawny woman who has been pushed under a shower fully dressed.

For a city to survive a stranger's favorable estimate during inclement weather, its attractions must be socially abundant or esoteric. This vulnerable guest, returning to Copenhagen in mid-winter, found that with the surcease of sunshine the place was charmless. Wind and slush were now the arbiters of the city's aesthetic identity: as a consequence its limitations were magnified. Danish nonchalance was transformed into exasperating diffidence, the ever-ready spirit of inquiry into a subterfuge for their quietly jealous scorn of all outlanders. The common-level lack of sophistication suddenly loomed as crucial when one was unable to get shoes cleaned even adequately or have a suit pressed without getting it back wrapped securely like a package of meat, or being unable to find erasable typewriter paper which the Danes seemed to think was an American joke unworthy of adoption. At such a time the food, for all but the luxury-hotel resident, surrenders its last claim to one's tolerance, the coffee nominates itself for prime symbol of Danish ingenuity (their talent for reducing all grades of coffee to a brackish uniformity is diabolical and unsurpassed), and the language— conspicuously if you have visited Sweden during intermission —the spoken language is an affront to the ear and to the pulse. Especially mystifying then is the universally entertained notion that Copenhagen is "continental"! Continental it is literally, but in no other sense. To the Swede who is too impatient, with the onset of Spring, to thaw himself out at home, Copenhagen, the first sizeable city he encounters in his southward haste—and frankly more casual than anything Swedish could be—may assume exaggerated dimensions. Yet, beyond one streetful of brothels and the Tivoli gardens (open only in summertime) it offers limited attractions for the pleasure-minded. *Konditoris* are fewer and less inviting than those of Stockholm, shops are not open as many hours of the week, theatre is scantier and although Copenhagen has actually a larger population than Stockholm it has a third the number of movie houses.

To rescue one's civility from a decisive rout, it is best to recall the lyrical beauty of the city as you first experienced it while the remains of summer were cooperating with the contingent rhythms of commerce: the deep-sea ferries, barges, tankers, training brigs and liners wedging their sundry ways, heavily or *glissando*, through the opening drawbridges; a cumber-

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some freighter coaxed into gracefulness by two small confident tugs which swivel her, end for end, like a pinwheel; the sentries at the Royal Palace performing their *andante staccato* manual-of-arms, like a sequence in a Lubitsch movie; the varying tempi of the mass cyclists and automobiles and double-jointed trams as they streak, surge or hobble over the bridges, and everywhere the white gulls, coasting and screaming above the equestrian statues and pitched roofs and tall masts and the round-tower of Tycho Brahe, up the interior ramp of which Peter the Great once rode his horse (one of those jocular anecdotes standing by to become a fearsome allegory any year now). Beauty or comic relief—Copenhagen will supply you with either, and the fun will lay flattering unction to your soul. Moments are plentiful when Denmark appears to have followed the advice for government in Maxwell Anderson's *Knickerbocker Holiday*, "Keep it small, keep it funny." To wit: the sexual mores, as relaxed here as everyone Outside seems to think they are in Sweden (an utterly fallacious rumor), inspired a written protest to the number-one newspaper, not long ago, from an outraged matron. The occasion for her outrage was the concentration, excessive to her mind, of enterprising and immodest homosexuals in the city's central square, the Radhusplats. Her protest was acknowledged and its substance relayed to the offenders in a published reply from none other than the Mayor, himself, who politely voiced his belief that it might be advisable for the troublesome sect, hereafter, "to disperse themselves more widely about the city."

Copenhagen, like life (or any place), can be a comedy to those who think, a tragedy to those who have a low threshold of identification. In my annals, Denmark will also be that vicarious hour when I ceased being the querulous onlooker and for the hushed time-being, at least, became a participant, retroactively. It took place at a screening—which may not be surprising—where, in the company of someone who had been substantially engaged in the Resistance, I was viewing a plausibly authentic film dealing with the German Occupation, *Red Meadows*. On the screen, an imprisoned Resistance member was nursing his maimed fingers, crushed to bonelessness in a Nazi instrument of catechism, as he counted the strokes of the Radhus clock. I was just thinking that if I heard those particular chimes in a movie anywhere in the world I would recognize them, when the clock, itself—not two blocks distant from the screening room—tolled the hour. The moment was electrifying, and ineffable. It annihilated my already ebbing detachment, as it tricked time, and strengthened the antipathy lodged in my aching throat for those invaders, consistently in excess of human indecency, who had shot down the tin-soldier guards of the palace in front of their sentry-boxes because they *were*, after all, armed! . . . "It happened *here*, too!" I told myself, as if I hadn't known before. To think on that was to regain a measure of the loyalty one is never big enough to sustain when the nerve-ends are assailed by private desperations. When you share another's proximity to death you increase your respect for his life.

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What are the sources from which we have derived our art-image of "Scandinavia"? Unless you lay claim to a scholar's familiarity with the Icelandic Eddas or the Finnish composite, *Kalevala*, you'll more readily bring to mind the modern contributions, mainly from Norway and Sweden: Ibsen, Grieg, Knut Hamsun, Selma Lagerlof, the silent movies of Sjostrom and Stiller, Edvard Munch, Strindberg, Sibelius—and Garbo. The common quality, over-riding distinctions of media and subject, is something we feel as "Northern," is it not?—form under stress, passion chastened into anguish, something moody-austere and secretly lyrical. And nothing of it is Danish. Denmark, uneasily rooted to the continent while facing, with an air of amused grievance, the countries between the Baltic Depression and the North Sea, was separated geographically from the rest of Scandinavia centuries ago, when the icecaps melted. How many centuries later the spiritual divorce between these related areas was affected is food for speculation. In recent times, political and linguistic affinity assigned Denmark to "Norland" but psychologically she acquired her own raffish outlook; her latter-day sources of expression have been alternately baroque and pragmatical. (The contemporary film art of Carl-Theodore Dreyer is anomalous. Irreducibly Nordic, it is not compatible either with Danish secularism or Danish whimsy.)

Before three o'clock of an early December afternoon, the sunset sky above the bridged islands of noble Stockholm has already burned down from rose to orange near the horizon. Reverberations of amber or bronze ignite the imperious church spires, tint the wings of wild geese and the lime-white torsos of the birches in the Djurgaden, and shudder through the cruel green ice-bound waters of the Maleren like copper-tailings. The street lamps that punctuate the exposed sweep of the Strandvagen shine piercingly as if they were crystallizations of the cold air—particles of frigidity which, unable to freeze more intensely as substance, had become light. Soon, only a faint circumambience remains, promising a clear day tomorrow—if an even shorter one.

Sweden is the most poignantly misunderstood nation of the Scandinavian ensemble, the more so because the Swede, generically, misunderstanding himself, expends a generous degree of admiration on capacities he believes foreign to him. He admires Norwegian hardihood, Finnish heroism and what he construes as Danish liberalism. Further afield he is wistful before the spectacle of Parisian sophistication (a pandemic ailment) and charmed by British courtesy (his own is far less brittle). In return he gets bare toleration from his neighbors—and the Danes, almost invariably, trigger-react to any defense of Sweden with dismaying outbursts of contempt (a response which is much deeper, in my opinion, than the alleged disapproval of Swedish "neutrality" in War II from which, on the record, they benefited). I confess to a hopeless division on the Swedish subject: there are contradictions between my dispassionate observations and my empathy. To fall in love with a country is a terrible responsibility; for the critical bystander an absurd position. I join with others, however, in pro-

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claiming the more typical Swedish virtues as limitations: the domestic conservatism, the overweening respect for protocol, the inhibition of extrovert impulses, the middle-way sterile suburbanizing that makes even Americans—except those from the north Middle-West—shiver with revulsion. More corroding is the chronic, sub-surface alienation of male from female, an alienation unlike England's, for example, where resignation reigns; here it is mortally active (and confronted only by film scenarists). The pathos of the Swedish dilemma arises from the limbo which the individual Swede has reached. His pain is the pain of partial suicide. He is docile but not yet spiritually extinct; when he becomes so he will no longer suffer. None the less he has salvaged a priceless feature from his stoicism, in the possession of which he shames all populations I know. He is signally kind and unfailingly dependable in his professional commitments—a life-quality as rare in our day as Beauty or Truth. Meanwhile it's frightening to watch him doggedly denying the romantic in himself, whereas one doubts that the Englishman or the Dane—whose plight superficially resembles his—knows he has a romantic to deny.

The belief that suffering can be abolished by effacing yesterday's architecture, denying the instincts, instituting multiple social services and expanding the market is a heroic delusion not restricted to Sweden but, unhappily, while the surface of things undergoes reform here, the Swedish psyche remains unconvinced. And the less convinced it is, the more desperate is its unconscious struggle. In general, suppression has been achieved; a minority of spirits, as usual, registers the stress which the majority has survived or ignored. Even a quick glance at the biographies of creative personalities in Sweden of the last century reveals an alarmingly high ratio of painters, poets and actors who have gone mad or committed suicide. Conceivably the underlying tension of the Swede's relationship with his women is a corollary of his hostility toward nature, toward the ineluctable return of the dark days every year (about four months of them in Stockholm) when he is thrall to a force no technology on earth can prevent: hence his fear of enjoying summer too intensely and his sulky repudiation of the lyricism which seasonally stirs in his heart. Betrayed by nature, the Swedes have a latitude-neurosis, no doubt of it. Icelanders, Laplanders and Finns, living at the same parallels, have been equipped for psychological survival, but the urbanized Swede, having killed the Viking within, is now temperamentally incapable of liberating himself. So he tries to banish fear with comfort. Like the settlers in America who too swiftly eliminated the wilderness and found themselves in a wilderness of their own making, the Swede, too, has built supermarkets and cloverleaf highways and stripped-to-the-bone efficiency apartments with not enough lintel to chin oneself on. Flooding his long-night cities with incandescence, he pulls his Aalto-derived chair closer to the television set, and suffers at the thought of how horrible it would be to suffer.

And all the while August Strindberg is looking over his left (or sinister) shoulder. If a genius ultimately rises above racial contingencies he is not wholly independent of them, and Strindberg was Swedish—in the worst

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way, it may be; certainly in the way that no modern Swede could wish to take, for it would return him to the demons of the dark and to those labyrinths of expressionism from which he is in flight. When the paintings of Strindberg were last exhibited at the National Museum in Stockholm, in 1949, the accompanying catalogue included a number of essays by historians and critics. For the most part, these were notably apologetic, insisting that the freely rendered landscapes on view were mainly curiosa and not centrally pertinent to Strindberg's gifts as a playwright. But in fact Strindberg's painting was remarkable. The spontaneously blended paint texture, in key with the vehement romanticism of the mood depicted, may seem to be at the opposite pole from the bald and excruciating dialectic of *The Father*, *The Dance of Death* or *The Link*, but it's very close indeed (insofar as one may compare media without speciousness) to the bridging interlude in *Miss Julie* and the murky fantasia of *A Dream Play* or *The Spook Sonata*. However, no Swedish artist would dream (or do more than dream) of painting today in the manner of Strindberg—which happens to be the manner of a host of our international free-form painters—and although Strindberg has lost none of his currency as a "classic" in the theatre, he is not held in intimate regard by contemporary Sweden, for whom he is too "trägisk," by far! The analogy with Isak Dinesen's position in Denmark is too patent to be labored, after allowances are made for the likelihood that her "Gothic" tales, by their very nature, are easier to take or leave. Strindberg imposes himself.

Let me see a nation's movies and I care not who makes its laws. By reference to its movies, however, I'll *know* who makes its laws. Swedish art—painting and graphics—of the last forty years has increasingly been an art of the head, an art of design. The best Swedish films, sharing the taste for structural rigor, have otherwise constituted the last refuge of national romanticism—a term that does not exclude "realism" as a subcategory. Lately this spirit has been undermined by the concurrent distrust of adventure which obtains in other areas. Last New Year's, the film-premiere scene offered a number of interesting, if not hopeful, correlations for the observer.

Djunglsaga, Arne Sucksdorff's second feature-length film and his first mediocre achievement, a semi-documentary made in India, was accorded a Royal premiere and fortuitous rounds of applause. *Smultronstallet* ("Wild Strawberries"), to any alien critic and to some clear-eyed Swedish ones a tedious, sophomoric affair, opened in the same week, promoted chiefly on the sentimental circumstance that it was made by Sweden's youngest director of importance, Ingmar Bergman, and starred Sweden's oldest director, the laudable Victor Sjostrom. (Advance publicity was in circulation for the wide-screen version-in-progress of Sjostrom's 1920 masterwork, *The Phantom Carriage*, under the direction of Arne Mattsson.) Fellini's *Cabiria's Nights* was being generously supported at the neighborhood theatres by the innocent public who in this case confessed needs more vivid than the critics, who gave the film's first showing respectful

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notices, yet seemed highly disturbed by its sanguine temper. "This time Fellini has gone too far." Another documentary spectacle in color, made by two Italians in the Andes, *L'Imperio del Sole*, captured images and rituals from the Peruvian mountain-tops which quite diminished, in every way, Sucksdorff's *Djunglsaga*, and aroused no undue critical enthusiasm. *Nine Lives*, the superb Norwegian reconstruction of a liaison agent's appalling trek across the Lyngen Alps into Sweden during War II was dutifully praised and safely docketed as a "true adventure." While all this transpired, Alf Sjoberg, Sweden's most creative film director, was notable by his absence. Since he was at that moment fully involved at the Royal Dramatic Theatre, it would not be accurate to say that he was languishing, but it's a sad fact that he hasn't been given a film assignment for three years. Understandably, production financiers have investments to protect, yet financial losses are not uncommon in any film industry; more often than not, producers show greater charity toward failures that aimed considerably below the neck than toward films of ambitious intention. Which is why Sjoberg's film talent must go begging.

Lay criticism and the industry agree that Sjoberg is grandiose, an accusation to which I have to give partial assent: his frequent extravagance is a consequence of his aim to transcend naturalism and to use subjects with a more expressive potential than the contemporary taste in domestic realism provides. If it were not for his supremely inventive direction of Bergman's script, *Torment* (1945) and of his own reconception of *Miss Julie* (1951), the Swedish movie would be even less familiar to the audiences of the continent and of the United States. (Add to these *Himlaspelet*—"Road to Heaven," 1942, a fantasy derived from the folk art of Dalarna—and you have three motion pictures unsurpassed of their kind. His only living rival, at the level of sheer versatility, is the Japanese director Akiro Kurasawa.) Of this, producers are not unaware; they simply reiterate, "Be bold, be bold—but not *too* bold!" *Barabbas* (1953) was too bold; Sjoberg's temerity was more costly than the results were felt, by the front office, to justify. Filmed in large part, and lavishly, on location in Palestine, the film is indeed one of Sjoberg's faultier achievements. The drama of isolation and partial redemption, sparely outlined in the Par Lagerkvist novel on which the film was based, is finally submerged by the visual bravura with which Sjoberg amplified the setting. But I fail to understand why *Karin Mansdotter* (1954) was hardly more successful in Sweden, unsuitable as it may be for audiences elsewhere, owing to the necessity for inordinate explanations of the historical background. The film has a familiar national subject—adapted, with modifications, from Strindberg's play, *Erik XIV*—it uses local settings, palatial and scenic, of striking beauty, and has enough royal scandal, sword-play and insurrection to please anyone who is normally enticed by Olivier's film Shakespeare, or even by the lesser fabulism of Errol Flynn. I am closer to an understanding, however, when I recognize that the film was unacceptable for its distinguishing quality: it tells "sad stories of the death of kings" with an introductory sequence that mocks the myth before moving into the "reality,"

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and this compound approach was evidently too sardonic for the audience to assimilate. Democrats, no less than kings, always feel threatened by irony.

And I am closer, still, to a generic explanation, when I venture into film-talk circles where the bright young men, monotonously like the bright young men everywhere, tell me with good liberal intentions what my attitude toward movies should be—toward American movies, as well as Swedish! I find myself disputing, in vain, the same articles of faith adhered to by the recreants of New York, Paris and London: that such films as, for instance, *High Noon*, *Twelve Angry Men* and *The Bachelor Party* have importance above the level of a course in social studies or cinematic values sufficiently conspicuous to bear analysis; or that Bergman's perennial interest in problems is a more fruitful asset than Sjoberg's interest in national themes and tragic forces. In my opinion, the pedagogue in Ingmar Bergman is killing the showman, even as the showman tends to kill the artist. Twice in his career, to date, Bergman has been an explorer: in *Torment*, his first film script, and in *Gycklarnas Afton* ("The Naked Night"), 1953. With *Smiles of a Summer Night* (1956) he performed a beautiful trick of social geometry under the aspect of period farce. But more typically he fluctuates between a sophomoric, if usually photogenic, handling of the "big ideas" and a kind of superior soap-opera wherein he estimates, with some shrewdness, the probable mass-appeals: everybody loves religious allegory when it's made palatable with a genial skeptic for its hero (*The Seventh Seal*, 1957); everybody loves a troubled old (famous) man (*Smultronstallet*, 1957); everybody has been either a baby or a mother (*Nara Livet*—"Close to Life," 1958). His shrewdness has paid off. He and Victor Sjostrom were gold-plaqued by the Swedish Film Association this midsummer, and the Cannes Film Festival Award for his direction of *Nara Livet* was locally ratified. That the latter film features unusually frank scenes of that common arena, the maternity ward, and an intensely anguished performance by Ingrid Thulin does not reverse one's impression that this is essentially a talk-film, calculatedly, self-indulgently "intimate", and not half so creatively filmed as Bergman's *Waiting Women*, which it resembles, of 1952 . . . . To these aspersions on "liberalism" the Bergman partisans retort that there is nothing amiss with the prevalence of the talk-film because "people do talk." Further, they have assured me that my preference for European films over those made in Hollywood is a symptom of American Transcendentalism.

Tomorrow will be a short, beautiful day.

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Reviews

GEORGE P. ELLIOTT

Getting to Dante

IN CASE YOU ARE IN DOUBT about reading Dante or exploring further than the *Inferno*, you can do no better than to read (or reread) Eliot's Dante essay. For the purpose of that essay, most obviously, is that primary social function of literary criticism, to persuade you to read a good book, and it accomplishes its purpose admirably. The secondary function of criticism, to explain why the book is so good, Eliot's essay performs rather less well; one inaccuracy of the essay, its account of Dante's metaphors, has been corrected by Irma Brandeis,[1] and another I intend at least to point out below. But both of these shortcomings derived from his intention to make the book seem tempting and not too formidable to an intelligent, irreligious reader, that is, to the contemporary Common Reader—an intention which the essay fulfilled thirty years ago and which it can fulfill now if allowed to.

But a new and not small problem rears itself before one who has decided to read Dante—which translation to use.[2] Anyone with even a smattering of Italian should follow Eliot's advice to use a prose translation printed opposite-face to the Italian.[3] But what of those who do

[1] "Metaphor in *The Divine Comedy*," *The Hudson Review*, VIII (Winter 1955-56), 557-575.

[2] There have been four quite recent translations of the entire COMEDY: by *H. R. Huse*. Rinehart. $.95. —by *Geoffrey L. Bickersteth*. Aberdeen University Press. $6.25. —by *T. G. Bergin*. Appleton-Century-Crofts. $.95.—by *Glen L. Swiggett*. The University of the South Press. Price unknown. There is a translation of HELL and PURGATORY, by *Dorothy L. Sayers*. Penguin. $.85 each. There is a translation of the INFERNO, by *John Ciardi*. New American Library. $.50. There is one of LA VITA NUOVA, by *Mark L. Musa*. Rutgers University Press. $4.00.

In addition to these, there is a large number of translations still in print; often one will be available from several publishers (in which case I have listed only some convenient edition); and there are two or three which are not currently in print but which are often referred to, most especially Longfellow's. Of the entire *Divine Comedy*: H. F. Cary (Everyman, first published 1844); Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (Ticknor and Fields, 1867); Charles Eliot Norton (Houghton Mifflin, 1892-93); John Aitken Carlyle (Dent, 1912); Melville Best Anderson (Heritage Press, 1921); Jefferson Butler Fletcher (Macmillan, 1931); Lawrence Grant White (Pantheon, 1948); John D. Sinclair (Oxford, 1948). Of the *Inferno*: Lacy Lockert (Princeton University Press, 1931); Harry Morgan Ayres (S. F. Vanni, 1949). There is also *The Portable Dante* (Viking, 1947), including the Laurence Binyon translation of the *Divine Comedy* and the D. G. Rossetti translation of *La Vita Nuova*.

[3] The Carlyle pony in the Temple Classics is in an ornate old-fashioned prose. (It is reprinted by Modern Library without the Italian.) Ayres's pony of the *Inferno* is in stilted, involuted prose. Oxford has an opposite-face translation by Sinclair, which is superior to any other because of its clear, accurate, and vigorous prose and its excellent commentary; unfortunately, however, the Oxford edition is more expensive and the volumes are much larger, standard book size instead of pocket size.

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not have even that minimum of Italian? What of a teacher who must select a translation of the *Divine Comedy* for use in a course of great books in translation? Then which of the many now available in English is best to read?

The first, and natural, impulse is to turn towards verse translations; there are plenty now available,[4] but there are three recent ones which are most likely to be used. Dorothy Sayers' version of the first two canticles comes in a pleasant format, and she is well known for her mystery stories, plays, and literary-religious essays; she is straightforward and lively. John Ciardi's version of the *Inferno* is for sale in drug stores, he is a poet of repute and poetry-edits for *The Saturday Review*; he is readable and sometimes vigorous. Laurence Binyon's version of the entire *Comedy* comes bound with *La Vita Nuova* and some snippets of Dante's lesser works, and he himself has an honorable position as one of those unobtrusive yet decent worthies with which literary Britain has long abounded; he is mellifluous. All three versions observe the tercet, all are in iambic pentameters, and two are in terza rima (the third, Ciardi's, comes in tercets rhyming *a-x-a*); all have reasonably adequate notes and explanatory paraphernalia; and not one deserves to be dismissed flatly like, say, Rieu's *Iliad*, for damaging the original beyond salvaging. Yet I cannot recommend any of them highly. Binyon in quantity becomes tedious; Ciardi is over-strenuous and often fancy; Sayers seems to key everything down, to prettify the sublime and the rough and to domesticate the savage. As for diction, Ciardi and Sayers lapse sometimes into a modernity that makes one wince, and Binyon, as well as Sayers, employs a stilted, archaic idiom that often makes one yawn. As for the rhymes, I believe Ciardi's *a-x-a* to be the best solution; he speaks of "that third, all-consuming rhyme" of terza rima, and my reading in the others substantiates his complaint; yet Ciardi too was rhyme-forced into re-

[4] The old war-horse is Cary's translation, in a pseudo-Miltonic blank verse the effect of which is not unlike Gide translated into pseudo-Faulknerese. White has made another blank verse version, lacking Cary's special vice but also lacking much virtue of its own. Bergin's version is mostly in blank verse, though it jolts now and again into prose, heroic couplets, and terza rima; it is not even as good as White's. Indeed, none of these versions is up to Longfellow's; his blank verse was decent and his style consistent, he was usually clear and he observed the unity of the tercet. The truth is, as other translators point out, that blank verse is not only hard in itself (and hard to use without echoing one of the many masters) but it is intrinsically hostile to the special rhythmic movement of Dante's verse. The other verse translations, except for one, are in terza rima. The exception, an indifferent one by Fletcher, is in a rhyme scheme since employed by Ciardi, *a-x-a*. The most recent one, Swiggett's, strains like a poetical contortionist and achieves only banality, especially of rhythm. Bickersteth has produced a translation as good as any that has been made of the *Paradiso*—despite a good many rhyme-forced clumsinesses and an archaic and overly literary diction—for he attains something of that speed and elevation proper to the original; unfortunately his version of the first two canticles is inferior to that of the third. Lockert's version (of the *Inferno* only) is good and well annotated. Anderson's translation is amazingly lovely and at times felicitous; but unhappily the special romantic effects at which he excels are only occasionally Dantean and usually very far indeed from Dante's tone, either in a given passage or over-all.

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grettable excesses,[5] even though he allowed himself the greatest latitude in off-rhymes (my impression is that he was too impatient for the task). As for the most important matter aside from accuracy, the tone: while all have their merits, none of them catch, or if they catch it, sustain, that special sweetness, clarity, and speed of Dante's, or are capable of the considerable range of effects he demands of them.

The real trouble is iambic pentameter, which is not, or at least has never been in practice, enough like Dante's non-metrical line to do it justice. Now that accentual and syllabic lines have achieved good repute in poetic practice,[6] have been widely and well experimented with, have demonstrated in Lattimore's hands their usefulness in translation, I should think some venturesome and patient poet would be able, for the first time, to use a prosody rather close to Dante's in translating the poem.[7] He might rhyme in the manner of Fletcher and Ciardi or else use assonance as Fergusson does in the lines he translates for his book on the *Purgatorio*; in any case, he should not have terza rima to constrict him, so that he would be free to imitate the shifts and soaring and drive of Dante, while yet being constrained into a greater regularity than prose obtains.

Until that translation appears, however, I would recommend above all of these verse translations a prose version printed with a decent minimum of commentary. Aside from the two ponies already mentioned, there is Norton's, not the best but perfectly adequate, and a recent one by H. R. Huse, which is not only cheap but, as it seems to me, the best available at any price (except for Sinclair's). It is by no means the best possible—the *Divine Comedy* has yet to find a Richmond Lattimore—but it achieves accuracy and at the same time employs a dignified yet not "literary" prose. It is line for line, and is so printed, with lines grouped into tercets (the tercet is the basic rhythmic unit of the poem), but it makes no attempt at rhyme, meter, or regularity of line length; yet the simple fact of its being printed in lines and tercets suggests a minimum

[5] At least Ciardi admits it. He translates lines 124-126 of Canto V (from Francesca's speech) thus:

On a day for dalliance we read the rhyme
of Lancelot, how love had mastered him.
We were alone with innocence and dim time.

Then in a footnote to line 126 he says: "The original simply reads 'We were alone, suspecting nothing.' 'Dim time' is rhyme-forced, but not wholly outside the legitimate implications of the original, I hope. The old courtly romance may well be thought of as happening in the dim ancient days. The apology, of course, comes after the fact: one does the possible then argues for justification, and there probably is none."

[6] In America at least; current British practice, with few exceptions, seems to adhere to that pre-1914 prosody which Sayers lays down so flatly in the introduction to her *Inferno*—a scarcely modified Saintsbury!

[7] Dante's line has, normally, eleven syllables, with one major accent on either the fourth or sixth syllable, depending on where the cesura falls, and another on the tenth syllable, with an indeterminate number of secondary accents and no "feet." (This I take from the introduction to Bickersteth's translation of the *Paradiso*.)

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rhythm which has a certain minimal effect. Between a dignified prose and a verse whose effects are more limited than, different from, or incompatible with, Dante's, I think the prose is at least not inferior; when greater accuracy—neither omitting nor adding nor distorting the meaning more than is inevitable—is added to this other benefit, I am firmly decided in favor of prose.

Here are the last seven lines of Canto XXXII, in which Dante addresses Ugolino, who is locked in ice up to his shoulders and is chewing at the base of another man's neck. This is not a great display piece, nor is it especially vexed and obscure; a reasonably representative passage.

"O tu, che mostri per sì bestial segno
odio sopra colui che tu ti mangi,
dimmi il perchè," diss'io; "per tal convegno,
che se tu a ragion di lui ti piangi,
sappiendo chi voi siete, e la sua pecca,
nel mondo suso ancor io te ne cangi,
se quella, con ch'io parlo, non si secca."

"O thou who showest by such bestial deed
Thy hatred upon him thou dost devour,
Tell me why," said I,—"be but this agreed,
That, if good reason thy complaint empower,
I, knowing who ye are and what his crime,
May yet on earth above repay thy score,
So my tongue be not withered ere the time."

(Binyon)

"O thou that in such bestial wise dost sate
Thy rage on him thou munchest, tell me why;
On this condition," I said, "that if thy hate
Seem justified, I undertake that I,
Knowing who you are, and knowing all his crime,
Will see thee righted in the world on high,
Unless my tongue wither before the time."

(Sayers)

"You there," I said, "who show so odiously
your hatred for that other, tell me why
on this condition: that if in what you tell me
you seem to have a reasonable complaint
against him you devour with such foul relish,
I, knowing who you are, and his soul's taint,
may speak your cause to living memory,
God willing the power of speech be left to me."

(Ciardi)

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"O you who show by such bestial signs
hatred of him whom you are chewing,
tell me why," I said, "on this condition
that if you rightfully complain of him,
knowing who you are and his sin,
I may repay you up in the world
If that with which I speak is not dried up."

(Huse)

In a nutshell: high time to get away from "O thou," but the alternative is not "You there," it is "O you"; high time to bring "mangi" down from the altitudes of "dost devour," but the alternative is not "munchest," it is something like "are chewing."[8]

[8] All succeeding quotations from the *Comedy* in this essay are from the Huse translation.

Suppose your liking for the *Comedy* proves strong enough to carry you on to *La Vita Nuova*: what translation of *it* is best? There are only two in print, Rossetti's and a new one by a young American named Mark Musa. I began the latter with hope that it would rescue the book from that dreaminess which obscures Rossetti's. But the young Dante's lovely poetry, with all that softness and emotionality which lovely implies, has been altered by Musa into something rather too lively and, sometimes, harsh. Rossetti was lovely all right; indeed, what one objects to in him is the pre-Raphaelite excess of mistily lovely effects; yet it is an excess of the essential quality. The sonnet in chapter XIV ends with these lines:

(Amor) fiere tra' miei spirti paurosi
E quale ancide, e qual caccia di fuora,
Sicch' ei solo rimane a veder vui:

Ond' io mi cangio in figura d' altrui,
Ma non si, ch' io non senta bene allora
Gle guai de' discacciati tormentosi.

Musa steps *ancide* up to murder, makes something more plausible but less accurate out of *Ond'*, and imports a changeling for the pun and balance:

(Love) puts my frightened sense to the sword,
Murdering this one, driving that one out,
Till only he is left to look at you;
Thus, though his changeling, I am not so changed
But that I still can hear in my own soul
My outcast senses mourning in their pain.

Rossetti makes some small alterations and elisions but he is both sweeter and no lesss accurate than Musa:

. . . all my troubled senses he thrusts out,
Sorely tormenting some, and slaying some,
Till none but he is left and has free range
To gaze on thee. This makes my face to change
Into another's; while I stand all dumb,
And hear my senses clamour in their rout.

I am afraid Rossetti's version will have to serve until a better one than Musa's comes along.

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II

The usual pattern in reading the *Comedy* is to tourist along through Hell as through a chamber of horrors, ignoring with an occasional frown its structure, geographical and theological alike, then to begin leaping through Purgatory, disappointed at the altered tone and the swatches of theology, and to riffle through Heaven on an idle thumb. *I need help.* True. And if the impulse is strong enough to get you to a good library, you will discover an absolute battery of scholarship aimed at helping: Guelphs and Ghibbelines, Boniface VIII, Provençal poets and their secret religion, Virgil in medieval lore, supernatural journeys in Persian literature, numerology... None of these give you what you wanted; St. Thomas might, but few people have the incentive or patience (or, in my case, the ability) to plow through all that difficult thought. Eliot advises reading some of the poets Dante read; but if you don't know Italian, you aren't about to learn Provençal; and there are few even halfway decent translations of the poets Dante read. At about this point of perplexity, the nearest double-featured movie house offers attractions hard to resist, for what is needed more than anything else is a teacher—one who has enough learning to clarify important obscurities and enough tact to ignore the lesser ones and who can point at important things to look for and what they mean. Courses in Dante—are they not infamous for pedantry?

There appeared last year a couple of books for general readers of the *Divine Comedy*.[9] Sayers' *Further Papers on Dante* is, like its predecessor *Introductory Papers on Dante*, a collection of essays without much unity and with no pretensions to thoroughness. I do not recommend either of her books warmly, not because they lack intelligent ideas but because of their tone. Again and again she uses her considerable knowledge and experience of the poet to develop an idea well worth the trouble; her good sense does not ignore the real obstacles between us and Dante. Yet all this virtue is spoiled, for me, by a chronically disagreeable tone, the main faults of which are whimsy and coziness. In explaining (quite astutely) why Dante introduces a touch of comedy just before the famous narrative spoken by Ulysses, whose spirit is a flame, she gives us this:

> ...instead we have the private and personal Dante, preposterously perched on a breakneck piece of rock, and pouring out questions like an eager and excited schoolboy. "Yes, Master; thank you for telling me—but I'd guessed that. Who is in the big flame with the cloven tip? *Diomede and Ulysses*? Oh, Master, please, *please* let us wait till it comes! Don't say no! You see how dreadfully badly I want to speak to it."

Nor is this passage extraordinary for her. However, if you don't mind snuggling up to Dante, the ideas in these essays are worth looking at.

But a book I can recommend to one who needs and is willing to learn

[9] FURTHER PAPERS ON DANTE, by *Dorothy L. Sayers*. Harper. $4.00. DANTE'S OTHER WORLD, by *Bernard Stambler*. New York University Press. $6.50.

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from a teacher is *Dante's Other World* by Bernard Stambler. In fact, I have never come upon a better book for the purpose. The bulk of it is a section by section reading of the *Purgatorio*. You may ask: why a book on just the second canticle instead of the whole *Comedy?* For one thing, this job alone takes 220 pages (plus a 90-page introductory chapter and 60 pages of notes), and a common reader is not likely to take kindly to a larger commentary. More important, if your initial reactions to the poem have been sufficiently strong to make you want to understand it more deeply, to that understanding the *Purgatorio* is the key; most people get through the *Inferno* without needing much help, and if they then make it successfully through the *Purgatorio* they will know fairly well how to handle themselves in the *Paradiso*. Lastly, Stambler does touch on many important themes from the first and third canticles.

This book does not compete with Francis Fergusson's *Dante's Drama of the Mind*, which is also concerned with the *Purgatorio;* for Fergusson is speaking as a very advanced critic to those who are initiated into the mysteries of both very advanced criticism and Dante, and scarcely at all to that Common Reader whose merit, if not whose existence, he seems to lack interest in. Stambler does not intend to be comprehensive and inspiring, like Santayana in *Three Philosophical Poets*, or to develop one important idea connected with Dante as, say, Auerbach does in *Mimesis.*[10] Rather, Stambler intends, modestly, to guide you through the canticle from first line to last, to point out subtleties you might miss, to clarify references when necessary, to justify apparent irrelevancies, to make sure you understand the theology. Just this: he puts his scholarship and critical acumen to the service of the poem and the reader. (Scholarship, exegesis, criticism—they are after all servants to the arts.)

It should be understood that his book deals only with what can be translated into good prose, the substance and structure of the poem, and ignores all questions of sound. (The passages he quotes he himself translates in a form like Huse's—and does it quite well.) This omission is rather a pity, I think, for even without knowing Italian one can benefit by a good discussion of Dante's mastery of his verse; the best account of it I have come across is in the preface to Bickersteth's translation of the *Paradiso* (published by Cambridge University Press but out of print). It should also be understood that his analysis is slow and sometimes hard going, for it is thorough; but neither is the poem read fast or easily. However, granted these limitations, reading Stambler's book along with Huse's translation will help anyone but a scholar to grasp as much as he can hold of the substance and structure of the *Purgatorio.*

Stambler tactfully buries most of his quarrels and erudition in the notes (which are clumped together at the end where they do not trouble a reader uninterested in them) and in the long introductory chapter (which, being a survey of background material, is best ignored at first and dipped into as later occasion suggests). He avoids distracting the reader with too much information about the multitude of lesser figures

[10] From the sample of Auerbach on Dante to be found in his essay in *Mimesis*, I think it is time for his two earlier studies in Dante to be translated from German.

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in the poem, but amplifies our knowledge about them enough for us to appreciate why Dante used *this* figure at *this* point and gave him *this* speech. Furthermore, Stambler insists, with a most refreshing good sense, upon treating Dante the pilgrim and Virgil the guide rather more as characters in a dramatic story than as symbols; Stambler so defines allegory (he defines symbol narrowly) as to permit and encourage one to read the *Comedy* with rich complexity rather than as a sort of complicated, algebraic puzzle having little to do with life. This I believe is Stambler's chief contribution, over and above his industrious close-reading, to an appreciation of Dante—insisting that these people are mostly people and not symbols. For it is a fact that if you view Virgil as Reason or Natural Wisdom, rather than as a man (of Dante's re-creation) whose powers are limited to that which is rationally comprehensible, you will miss much of the fun and many of the subtleties in the *Inferno* and the first 27 cantos of the *Purgatorio*. And every once in a while Stambler, clarifying a difficulty from Dante, shoots off sparks.

The test of such a book, of course, is what you think of the author when in your opinion he is wrong. My most serious quarrel with him comes in his treatment of the end of XVII and beginning of XVIII, in which Virgil explains to Dante how the seven deadly sins derive from excessive, insufficient, or wrongly directed love, and also something about the nature of love. This passage is frequently taken as one of the crucial points of the entire poem and I have always especially liked it, found it illuminating. Stambler scorns it. He insists on Virgil's dramatic character as an Aristotelian and pre-Christian, whose account of sin must necessarily be only partial; and this is true. But he overdoes the dryness and wordiness of Virgil's speech, and especially its merely repeating the substance of a speech by Marco the Lombard in XVI. He calls his chapter treating these cantos "The Dead Center": "A dead spot as at the center of a cyclone—yet never entirely dead, because bits of paper and the like will be carried about and about lazily." He fantastically justifies this supposed deadness because the passage comes at the center of the canticle and also possibly because it takes place just as the voyagers are entering the terrace of sloth. In his irritation at the passage and at what he considers the excessive value attributed to it, he permits himself downright falsification. He says (of Canto XVII, on page 178),

> ...it is the dramatic character, Virgil, who is saying, at lines 100-1, that it is possible for the created one to love the Creator excessively.

But what Virgil actually says in lines 100-2 is this:

> *But when it [love] turns to evil or to legitimate pleasures*
> *with too much or too little care,*
> *the creature works against his Creator.*

Nearly always, however, he fights fair: before he enters upon his own interpretation of the disputed passage, he summarizes intelligently and at adequate length the majority position. A good teacher.

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III

Last year in San Francisco, the Juvenile Bureau of the police department brought a man to trial for publishing and selling obscene literature in the form of a pamphlet of verses, *Howl* by Allen Ginsberg. The chief defense witness was Mark Schorer, a literary man of eminence and authority, a maker and transmitter of taste, who testified that the pamphlet contained poetry, though he did not testify that the poetry was good; for that office it was necessary to procure Kenneth Rexroth. The prosecuting attorney kept asking Schorer what given lines from the poem "Howl" meant; to which he responded, in a fashion absolutely faithful to the Geist of our Zeit, "Sir, you can't translate poetry into prose. That's why it's poetry." Of course the statement was perfectly true, whether about "Howl" or "Jabberwocky" or "Full Fathom Five" or "De Rerum Natura." But, as written up in *The Reporter*, what the prosecutor seemed to want was an ordinary answer to the ordinary question "What is it about?" To this question it is quite possible to give a reasonable answer for most poems, including "Howl" (as in fact Schorer had done earlier in the questioning, by paraphrasing the whole poem in terms of its structure, a piece of information omitted from *The Reporter* article), but the answer to the other question implicit in the prosecutor's examination is not so easy: "Does this poem have a message?" Now I believe that there is a whole category of poetry which has and was intended to have a message that can be successfully paraphrased in prose.[11] And the greatest of this kind is the *Divine Comedy*.

This is directly contrary to the line hewed to by contemporary writers about Dante: Eliot devotes a considerable portion of his Dante essay to insisting that it doesn't matter whether a reader of the poem believes what Dante believed; Sayers asserts this same opinion without insistence, as though the point were established and self-evident; Fergusson so assumes it that he does not even (so far as I noticed) mention the matter; and Stambler in his preface says, "few readers of Dante are, I believe, practically troubled by this problem," for it is not belief or disbelief that is at issue, but understanding (understanding what? not Dante's substance but the order which is the structure of his poem). Now I not only think that such a view is false, but also that none of these four, on the evidence of their own practice, believe in it themselves.[12] Fergusson

[11] The judge in the trial obviously was of this persuasion: shortly before the *Howl* case he "had sentenced five lady shoplifters to attend *The Ten Commandments* and write penitential essays on the supercolossal epic's moral lesson." I would bet that he found a message in "Howl," an even more distasteful one than Ginsberg put into it; but all the same he ruled that the book did not violate the anti-obscenity statutes.

[12] However, there are critics who clearly and consistently hold this view. I. A. Richards says in *Principles of Literary Criticism:* "What can be translated in (Dante), the content, is precisely what is of least present and future interest, and at the same time most difficult to understand." A difficult content of little interest—that is a pearl beneath price. Yet he does not deny the greatness of the poem. And I have heard Cleanth Brooks assert that there was no connection whatever between a reader's belief and his full appreciation of the *Comedy:* "the truth of coherence" is what matters

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works hard at pretending that studying and enjoying the *Comedy* is a purely esthetic matter; but in the first chapter of his book he admits a Dantean, moral reason for reading it:

> It is strange that the *Divine Comedy* should have begun to be read again, after its eclipse during the period of the Enlightenment, just when the disappearance of the traditional culture was first sharply felt—with the revolutionary movements of the early romantics. Perhaps that is because the need for a way of life can only be felt with a depth comparable to Dante's, when no common way of life exists.

Exactly: and seeking for a way of life is not, *per se*, an esthetic endeavor at all. Stambler reveals himself throughout his commentary as a sort of part-time Thomist, and in so far as he is that he cannot possibly believe in the supremacy of esthetics; furthermore, the last sentence of his book declares a message:

> That there is another kind of real life is something that Dante can demonstrate to us, by process that can take us as high as his highest soaring.

Exactly: not that the other kind of real life is beautiful but that it exists. Sayers and Eliot are suspect by reason of the fact that they are publicly announced Catholics. "Do read Dante, he is terribly good and *of course* you don't have to believe in all that theology to enjoy the poem" (in Sayers' manner): from a convert or revert, this sounds a good deal more like seduction than like a statement of the truth. Eliot, in fact, was so uneasy about his whole position that he appended a long footnote to his essay, confessing the muddle of his thoughts and feelings on the subject.

Certainly it is true that you do not have to be a Catholic to read the entire *Comedy* with pleasure and profit, though I suspect that a real reading of the poem might move you toward Catholicism from wherever else you may be (unless you are a very uneasy Catholic, in which case it might move you away). Conversely it is true that many Catholics, otherwise competent to like the poem, take little pleasure in it; literary Catholics of the Seventeenth Century, when the poem was slighted in favor of *Jerusalem Delivered*, seem to have found it far less rewarding than literary skeptics of our own age find it; unsympathetic agreement will not do so well as sympathetic disagreement. It is true that a good teacher and guide for the *Comedy*, one like Stambler, by no means needs to be a Catholic to do his work with entire competence, for he can tell you as accurately as any Dominican what is there and how it is put together. Granted sympathy with Dante's enterprise, a scholar-teacher who disagrees with his theology can comprehend the poem, and assist you to

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in any poem, not "the truth of correspondence." To be sure, the truth of some poems is to be found in the principle by which they cohere; but this is not, as Brooks seems to maintain, the whole truth in all poems.

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comprehend it, thoroughly and well; the aim of scholarship is not experiencing but knowing about a work of literature; its esthetic reason for being is that there are many such works which you cannot appreciate without knowing a great deal about them first. In any case, the *total experience* of Dante's poem, as I conceive the matter, needs but goes beyond comprehension and sympathy, goes into belief and agreement. For small example: I should think that a contemporary of Dante's would enjoy the *Comedy* in a way inaccessible to our experience (though not to our comprehension) if only because he believed that the earth was the center of the universe; imagine how it would feel to read a poem which by its very construction clarified and ordered and intensified your belief that about the fixed globe there circle planets that sing and stars that will never burn out, up among which you may hope to ascend, first soul then body, in joy forever; how can we, whether Christian or atheist, more than dimly appreciate such feelings? Furthermore it is true that there are philosophies such that their stubborn adherents cannot enjoy more than the big game hunt for prize horrors from the *Inferno*. I have three main reasons for these assertions (I have noticed that, while I am reading Dante and for quite a time afterwards, things tend to come in threes, while with Blake it is fours): the fortunes of the poem in the past, Dante's announced intentions, and my own cantankerous experience that life refuses to be divorced from literature even as it refuses to succumb to it.

About the first of these three points, not much need be said. On the one hand the poem has been quarried for centuries for quotations usable in daily life for consolation, insult, clarification, delight; on the other it has been hated by those who were ideological enemies of Dante's faith. In the eighteenth century, most firm believers in the Enlightenment, Voltaire, for instance, had no use for him at all; Horace Walpole disposed of him once and for all the age: "extravagant, absurd, disgusting, in short a Methodist parson in Bedlam." Perhaps they had artistic reasons for hating him, and certainly one cannot account for all the vicissitudes of taste and reputation; but it is also obvious that they profoundly disagreed with the way he said the world was put together. For the pill is not sugar-coated, and they developed no taste for the Angelic Doctor's medicine itself, even in verse. This is a sound reason: I doubt that Dante would have cared to have Horace Walpole like his poem.

As for the second point in my argument, Dante's intention in writing his poem was altogether clear. (I find frivolous and obnoxious the arrogance which claims that, though great writers can not explain what they were *really* doing, esthetico-psychology can.) In a letter dedicating *Paradiso* to his patron, the Can Grande of Verona, Dante says:

> . . . the branch of philosophy which regulates the work in its whole and in its parts, is morals or ethics, because the whole was undertaken not for speculation but for practical results.

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And about the hidden allegory, the meaning or message, he has this to say:

> . . . if the work be taken allegorically the subject is "man, as by good or ill deserts, in the exercise of the freedom of his choice, he becomes liable to rewarding or punishing justice."

In our day it is the fashion to treat myths and symbols as among the necessary conveniences of literature but not as exact correspondents of the truth. Yeats is especially our poet;[13] he did not have to use Byzantium as a symbol, for that symbol's attributes derive most importantly from Yeats rather than from the actual city. Now it is true that Dante was a conscious mythmaker-poet like Yeats, and most of the lesser symbols and parts of his myth were arbitrary like Yeats's; for example, the details of the Hell he found in the afterworld are nearly all of his own contrivance. Nevertheless, I submit that Dante has as much in common with Freud as with Yeats: just as Freud did not divide the psyche into libido, ego, and superego because it was convenient or elegant but because that was what he saw when he looked, so Dante had no alternative but to locate a Hell in the afterworld, for God had constructed things that way. Dante wanted the *Comedy* to be read (nearly as he himself read Genesis) as a myth of what is—a myth which, though told by a man, is arranged by a man only in the details, for its main structure conforms to the way God created the world. He made his grand myth for the reason Freud made his myth-like scheme of the psyche, to reveal that which exists hidden apart from myth, mythmaker, symbol, interpreter, art, and science: the truth.[14] Ultimately, though both of them knowingly employed myths, both of them intended to be literal: we have Oedipus complexes; in Heaven, light becomes a symbol of itself.

A believing Catholic will encounter no religious barriers in his way to Dante, and a Protestant who can recite the Creed without reservation will meet few. If one believes in God and sin, as many "sociological" Jews and half-lapsed Christians do, without being quite sure what other religious beliefs he holds, or if one is an uneasy apostate like the Santayana of Bertrand Russell's mot, "There is no God and Mary is his mother," then he can get most of the way to Dante, to the moral essence of his teaching, that to which his poem owes much of its greatness. An agnostic esthete or intellectual willing to suspend most of his disbeliefs can get at least an esthetic pleasure from Dante—an enormous pleasure, that—though there are long passages in the second and third canticles

[13] Our age has at least one first-rate artist who is Dantean in this respect: Carl Dreyer. The witches in his film *Day of Wrath* are neither hysterical women nor hypocrites nor stage props nor elements in a pattern: they are witches.

[14] For a subtle, thorough, and handsomely written account of Dante's intentions in his most complex use of allegory, I recommend two essays, "Allegory" and "The Substance of Things Seen," from *Commedia: Elements of Structure*, by Charles S. Singleton (Harvard University Press, 1954). I owe the main idea of this paragraph to these essays.

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where he is likely to be severely bored. But I cannot see how a convinced materialist, a hidebound skeptic, or a secure atheist, in a word, anyone who holds a disbelief so firmly that he is unwilling or unable to suspend it and who refuses sympathy to those with whom he disagrees, would be able to read the *Divine Comedy* with much benefit; for, irked or repelled by much of what he understood of the poem, he could not experience it fully. Dante intends us to believe as he believed, not temporarily or for an esthetic pleasure, but because his faith is the one true faith; and this intention is impossible to ignore. He believes in God and in love as drawing us to God, in Adam's fall and in Christ's redemptive power; some readers can put these beliefs off, for the purpose of the poem, as conventional. But what is one to do with the afterworld itself? Obviously Dante did not mean us to take his journey as having happened (though many do so take it), but just as obviously he meant us to take it as possible; Heaven may not be exactly as he represents it, but there is such a place and in essence it is as he represents it.[15] Some are able, as I am, to trope the afterworld away for the purpose of reading the poem; some are content to write it off as a loss; some let the whole issue float along undisturbed. But how anyone can read the *Comedy* without accepting Dante's beliefs about sin, I do not understand, for the heart of this poem is a vision of moral order. And by sin I do not mean crime or guilt, or the state of mind of one who has committed a crime or is guilty of he knows not what: I mean what the dictionary says of sin, a serious transgression of divine or moral law—a non-psychoanalytical, non-sociological matter because it assumes the law is *there* whether we like it or not, recognize it or not.

There is, to be sure, a large and honorable category of admirers of Dante which I have not mentioned. They live in a social world so unjust it has long seemed to deserve revolution but which each actual revolution has worsened; in a psychological world of which every would-be law is assaulted by anthropology (there are even some islanders, so I have heard, with no incest taboos); in a material world from which the physicists themselves have extracted all the matter; in a self-proclaimed rational and man-centered world whose nations are devoting their subtlest energies to elaborating, in the name of security and peace, means by which they can mutually reduce one another in less than a day to nothing; in a world so secular it recommends church-attendance as being good both for your career and for your mental health. Knowing too much, unable to drown their troubles, relativized, reeling, they wish so strongly for a moral order intellectually sound and esthetically pleasing that they can wish-fulfill themselves into Dante's poem so far one cannot tell their beliefs from his. Until they re-emerge reeling again. For they had only a dream, whereas he had a vision. (A dream is at-

[15] Including its spatiality; for the bodies of Jesus and Mary are already in Heaven and the bodies of all the other dead shall join their souls at the Day of Judgment; and bodies cannot exist without space.

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tached to the past and passes, whereas a vision can change you because it has to do with things to come. *Understanding* a dream may change you, but that is about all you can do with it.) Dante spoke of these, by metaphor, when he had Virgil say of the virtuous pagans in Limbo (*Inferno* IV):

> *"they did not worship God rightly;*
> *among such as these am I myself.*
>
> *For such defects, not for other faults,*
> *are we lost, and afflicted only*
> *in that we live in longing without hope."*
>
> *Great grief* [says Dante] *gripped my heart when I heard this,*
> *for I knew that people of much worth*
> *were in that Limbo in suspense.*

For anyone born into this world, reared in it, in it now, Dante's full faith is impossible. But one of the ways out of this limbo of our own creation is to follow Dante as far as it is possible.[16]

The last main point in my argument is that my own experience with the poem is like my experience of many other works of art in this: it is not purely esthetic. That which makes a painting beautiful is, no doubt, independent of the object that may be represented in the painting, but I am not well enough compartmentalized, estheticized, to be indifferent to the object: if it is a portrait, I get a special and non-plastic pleasure from perceiving qualities in the face represented, and I have been taught by some paintings and photographs to see actual people better than I had seen them before. I could not like the *St. Matthew's Passion* so well if the text were a description of the coronation of George II (nor, surely, could Bach have written that music to such words). I can not imagine a statue of a reptile or of a no-thing which could please as *David* does; Caesar in a play had better not die of hiccoughs; there is more to Chartres cathedral than architecture. Respect, experience of suffering, belief, the body's actions, the fact of a matter—these and more like them can get all mixed up, inextricably and happily, in art as in love and religion. And so they did with Dante: to disentangle the moral teaching from his poem and hold it separate while you read, seems to me an act of violence.

For my own part, I first read Dante in much the same spirit as I did Lucretius; I wholly enjoyed the power and consistency and harmony with which both poets created a poetic world which was also a cosmology; in this respect I liked Dante better only because he did it better. But Lucretius did not persuade me of the truth of Epicureanism, so that from *On the Nature of Things* I took away no more than the memory

[16] This is the reverse process from that of certain esthetic miserables of our day: just as they learn Italian so as to be able to read Dante more adequately, so they seem to have embraced Catholicism because it is the religion of Dante, and especially of T. S. Eliot.

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of a fine poem, that is, a purely esthetic memory (as well as the notion that maybe the soul comes in little round atoms); whereas Dante altered the way I see the world, as he may alter it again. My comprehension of sin was quickened and deepened by Augustine, but it has been expanded and clarified by Dante. It is because of Dante's account of his fictional experiences in Hell and Purgatory, and their allegorical meanings, and also because of his explicit, paraphrasable, translatable analysis of sin in the *Purgatorio*, that I believe in a moral scheme of things according to which hypocrisy is more sinful than simple murder, sloth is graver than adultery, and all sin derives from love rather than from some external force of evil, consists in fact in the sinner's deluding himself that wrong love is right; it is largely because of the *Paradiso* that I believe that the highest conceivable, and also the highest possible, experience is mystical vision.[17] I am grateful to Dante for having persuaded me of the truth of these beliefs, which, however, I believe not because they are Dantean, poetic, mythic, viable, but because I am convinced they are true. (Aquinas could have convinced me of them as well, I suppose, but I cannot read him because of his style.) I am also persuaded that these non-esthetic beliefs are essential to my enjoyment of the *Comedy*, incomplete though it is, and that disbelieving in them would cut one off from something ultimately worth having both in the poem and out of it. It is these and others like them—not just its own structure—that the poem is about.

Towards the end of Canto IV of *Paradiso*, Dante the pilgrim says in gratitude to Beatrice:

> *I see clearly how our mind*
> *is never satisfied unless the truth*
> *that includes all illumines it.*
>
> *Therein it rests, like a beast in its den*
> *when it reaches it, and it can—*
> *otherwise every desire would be in vain.*
>
> *Therefore at the foot of the truth,*
> *like a sprout, questioning grows, which pushes us on*
> *from peak to peak toward the summit.*

Caveat lector.

[17] *Structure and Thought in the Paradiso*, by Joseph Anthony Mazzeo (Cornell University Press, 1958), a collection of six scholarly essays, contains an instructive discussion of "Dante and the Pauline Modes of Vision," which I recommend to anyone interested in the subtleties of visionary experience.

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SIDNEY MONAS

A Miracle is a Miracle

UNLIKE THE PREVIOUS WORK of Boris Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*[1] is a straightforward, strictly prose narrative of considerable scope. It has been compared, and not entirely unjustly, to the Russian novels of the nineteenth century. It has their old-fashioned, almost archaic simplicity, their sense of immediacy and spontaneity, and recalls those artful works where the word *zapiski* (variously translated as "notes," "sketches," "diary") seems natural and right in the title. It has also their fine sense of distinction between the human *community*, where men deal with men as human beings on the basis of qualities rooted in nature and in themselves, and the human *collective* where men deal with each other as functions in the machinery of politics or profit. One might even say that Russian literature arose out of the crucial need for this distinction in a country where a European conscience suffered the political yoke of an oriental despotism, and that it culminated in *War and Peace* where the distinction was made most articulate and on the grandest scale.

Pasternak's novel is not, however, a masterpiece in any craftsmanly sense. There are too many clumsy coincidences, too many blank faces, there is too much unabashed philosophizing and too much awkward and unlikely talk. And yet, it moves one to have brought into use again such long-drowsing and nowadays embarrassing phrases as "the meaning of life," "personal integrity," and "tragic wisdom." It moves one for its courageous confrontation of the limitations and the cruelty of politics. The awkwardness seems finally inconsequential, and the courage stands. All this sounds perhaps too solemn. The novel leaves us when we are done with an image not unlike Yeats's Chinamen in the poem "Lapis Lazuli":

> *Their eyes, mid many wrinkles, their eyes,*
> *Their ancient, glittering eyes, are gay.*

Doctor Zhivago begins with a death and ends with a resurrection. Yurii Zhivago is first seen as a small boy at his mother's funeral in 1902, in his first experience with death. His reaction to it is stark and immediate. He howls like a wolf-cub. It fixes his attention on the natural element that recurs throughout the book as a symbol of the overlaying hand of death: snow. "The blizzard was alone in the world; it had no rival." The book ends in the late 1940's with two friends of the late Zhivago reading a collection of his poems, or rather the book ends with the poems themselves, which recreate the meaning of Zhivago's life. As they read, the city of Moscow lies stretched before them in the grip of a spring awakening. They recall incidents from the past. "So shall the centuries," speaks the resurrected Christ in Zhivago's last poem,

[1] DOCTOR ZHIVAGO, by *Boris Pasternak*. Pantheon. $5.00.

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" . . . . *drift, trailing like a caravan,*
Coming for judgment, out of the dark, to me."

The name "Zhivago" suggests the archaic genitive form of an adjective that means living, alive, persistent. Its bearer grows up an orphan in the milieu of the Russian intelligentsia, to which he, fundamentally, belongs. The intelligentsia was distinguished by a moral passion which at its most intense clothed itself in an almost religious materialism (Soloviev once suggested as an appropriate maxim for the intelligentsia: "Man is descended from the apes; therefore we must love one another!") and by its sense of estrangement from the dark illiterate masses on the one hand and the rigid bureaucratic state on the other. Estrangement from the masses carried with it a burden of guilt reflected in the questions the intelligentsia most typically posed for itself: "Who is to blame?" and "What is to be done?" Estrangement from the state implied also an estrangement from Russia's past insofar as it had been dominated by the state; Kliuchevsky summed up five hundred years of Russian history in the phrase, "The government grew fat while the people grew lean." Hatred and distrust for the government, a guilty longing to reach the people, a sense of loneliness and isolation in the world: these made the intelligentsia band together into little groups and coteries of like-minded individuals; these made it peculiarly sensitive to winds of doctrine from the West, which it attempted to harness not as energy for truth but as a force to forge weapons against the hated autocracy. Who was to blame? The autocracy. What was to be done? It must be smashed and the powers of government used to lift the people from their poverty, backwardness and ignorance. In these terms the intelligentsia conceived its mission. It would smash the state and help the people. When the revolution came many who were far from being Bolsheviks hailed Bolshevism as the longed-for apocalypse of the old order and adhered to a doctrine that was not integral to them, largely out of a lack of loyalty to anything within themselves. Against all this, Zhivago stands as a gentle but vigorous rebuke:

> Gregariousness is always the refuge of mediocrities, whether they swear by Soloviev or Kant or Marx . . . . How many things in the world deserve our loyalty? . . . One must be true to immortality, which is another word for life—true to Christ!

He, too, conceives of himself as a mediator, but in a different sense. As a man of genuine talent, he mediates between nature and history. Whether he works as a doctor or as a poet he strives always to deepen his sense of the meaning of life, trusting above all else in his own concrete experience, and to make this sense available to a human community in terms of articulate, clearly expressed language. He, too, hails the revolution at first as a clearing away, an unleashing of creative possibilities. "These days," he says, "I have such a longing to live honestly, to be productive. I so much want to be a part of all this awakening." But observing the curious behavior of his friends, he begins to change his mind about the revolution.

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He thinks regretfully of the time "when everyone's life existed in its own right, and not as an illustration for a thesis in support of the rightness of a superior policy." He keeps a notebook which he calls "Playing at People, A Gloomy Diary or Journal Consisting of Prose, Verse, and What-have-you, Inspired by the Realization that Half the People Have Stopped Being Themselves and Are Acting Unknown Parts."

Zhivago's Christianity has little in common with the orthodoxies of that name. It is, in fact, opposed to orthodoxy as such. It takes something from Tolstoy, something from Zhivago's Uncle Nikolai (who is strongly reminiscent of a number of prominent Russian intellectual figures during the period between 1905 and 1917: Blok, Berdyaev, Bulgakov), but essentially it grows from within. Even Uncle Nikolai becomes, rather ironically, the founder of a new coterie; but Zhivago produces only poems. For Zhivago, Christ is "the mystery of the individual." He takes very much to heart the words of Uncle Nikolai:

> " . . . the most important thing is that Christ speaks in parables taken from life, that He explains the truth in terms of everyday reality. The idea that underlies this is that communion between mortals is immortal, and that the whole of life is symbolic because it is meaningful."

Later, Zhivago meditates on the greatest miracles in the Old and New Testaments: in the former, the crossing of the Red Sea; in the latter, the birth of Jesus. In the Old, pomp and fanfare, spectacle and public glory; in the New, a quiet private event: something that happens spiritually within as opposed to a major hullabaloo on the outside. For Zhivago, it is with this inwardness that human history truly begins.

History, says Uncle Nikolai, "is the centuries of systematic exploration of the riddle of death, with a view to overcoming death . . . . " Or again: "History is another universe, made by man with the help of time and memory in answer to the challenge of death." It is not a mortgage on the future, the Realization of Reason, or of the Classless Society. One participates in history by living, not by "preparing to live." Elsewhere, Pasternak has called "savoring the future in advance" a pose—a deadly pose. History is analogous to nature; it "cannot be seen, just as one cannot see grass growing." It is the quiet accumulation of countless inner, private experiences, intimately connected and mysteriously interrelated, that bursts into the bloom of an event. It is not the development of industry that is the open book of men's minds, but the motifs of science and art.

"I have never seen art as form," Zhivago writes in his notebook, "but rather as a hidden, secret part of content . . . . If there is so much as a particle of it in any work that includes other things as well, it outweighs all the other ingredients in significance . . . . " And again, "only the familiar transformed by genius is truly great." At the end of the First World War, returning home from the front on a train, he notices the fragrance of the linden trees in blossom: ". . . as if it were some sort of rumor that had reached even the smallest, local stations, and which the passengers always found waiting for them on arrival, heard and con-

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firmed by everyone." He then sees his return to private life as the only meaningful experience: " . . . this was what art aimed at—homecoming, return to one's family, to oneself, to true existence." It is during a brief period of completely private life that Zhivago writes his poems and that he feels at the same time completely his own man, the unity of character and talent, and a close continuity with the life of the past. It seems to him that it is not himself who writes, but the force of poetry in his time.

Three women trace the course of Zhivago's life. Their paths cross and re-cross through a series of remarkable coincidences that become the web and tissue of Zhivago's experience. The first is his wife, Tonia, with whom he has grown up. They share a mutual sense of the past, and are betrothed by Tonia's mother on her deathbed, almost as a sequel to a series of reminiscences and anecdotes from family history. But they are pried apart by circumstances, and in the end Tonia and their children emigrate abroad, leaving Zhivago still a prisoner of a partisan band in Siberia. The last woman to love Zhivago, Marina Shchapov, rescues him when he is down and out. She appears as a dim fragment of the past he has shared with Tonia—the daughter of their former janitor, a clever girl now working as a librarian in an institute of Soviet culture. She treats Zhivago with great solicitude and devotion in tribute to qualities which she alone is left to recognize. But he has worn away in the struggle to keep himself intact before the onslaught of the revolution. He dies finally of a heart attack in a stalled tram among an indifferent crowd, and Marina defers at his funeral (the last rites surreptitiously performed under the cold regulations of the Bolsheviks) to a tall, mysterious woman who appears as if from nowhere.

She is Larissa Federovna Guishar—Lara—the most vital and dearly loved woman in Zhivago's life. The daughter of a cultivated but impoverished and rather foolish widow of Belgian descent, she has had to cope (unlike Zhivago) with the very harsh conditions of Russian reality from early childhood. Still in her teens, she is seduced by her mother's lover, Komarovsky, a corrupt, self-centered, confident, handsome lawyer, who at once attracts and repels her. He is a man of the world, intent on preserving his autonomy of will and action, for which purpose he has walled himself in from life: by a careful and utterly surface routine, by a vigilant housekeeper, and by a fierce black dog, his constant companion. He wills himself to care for nothing but pleasure and power. But Lara exerts an irresistible fascination on him. Once he has her, he discovers that he can neither keep her nor let her go. She threatens to break down the walls. She makes him feel guilty and small. She will not stay in the bourgeois box of petty sensuality, the faded apartment of a kept woman. Finally, he forces himself to break with her. Astounded by her attempt to shoot him down at an intimate party, Komarovsky is left alone with his lust, his guilt, and a struggling, unwilled sense of responsibility: "Streaks of light probed from room to room and dived under the chairs and tables like thieves and appraisers."

Lara has a similar effect on Pasha Antipov, whom she takes under her

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wing when he is still a boy, whom she loves and nurtures and marries. Unlike Komarovsky, he is high-minded, in a public sense, but it is a sense that makes his mind not his own. The son of a railway-worker, he is bright, sensitive to the least pressure from outside, a talented mime and a quick learner. He casts about eagerly for facts and principles. He needs principles to face life. He sees the 1905 Revolution begin as a kind of lark ("The boys are shooting," thinks Lara) and end as murder and injustice: " . . . the sun, setting behind the houses, pointed as though with a finger at everything red in the street—the red tops of the dragoons' caps, a red flag trailing on the ground, and the red specks and threads of blood on the snow." He worships Lara, who knows so much, who takes him by the hand, and even after his knowledge of the world leaves hers behind, he cannot settle with the disturbing image of her leading him. The night of their wedding he is obsessed with a streetlight outside their bedroom window, which he cannot somehow curtain off: "This light gave Pasha no rest, he felt as if they were being watched. He discovered to his horror that he was thinking more of the streetlamp than of Lara or of himself or of his love for her." He leaves her. In the course of the civil war, he becomes a red general. His pseudonymn Strelnikov ("the Shooter") is transformed by peasant rumor into Razstrelnikov ("the Executioner"). He intends all along to return to Lara, when he has become worthy enough, when his fame will convert her from mother to wife. Lara sees him only once, briefly:

> "It was as if something abstract had crept into his face and made it colorless. As if a living human face had become the embodiment of a principle, the image of an idea. My heart sank when I noticed it. I realized that this had happened to him because he had handed himself over to a superior force, but a force that is deadening and pitiless and will not spare him in the end."

During a chance meeting, Strelnikov treats Zhivago with high-minded contempt. Zhivago is impressed by him, but reflects: "If he were really to do good, he would need in addition to his principles, a heart capable of violating them . . . . " Lara insists, and she is right, that he is "just like a child." With the civil war almost over, Strelnikov himself becomes a fugitive from the revolution. During a last meeting with Zhivago, he feels a desperate urge to unmask himself, to clear himself in the light of his principles. But he "monstrously distorts everything," and with the confession done, kills himself.

To Zhivago, Lara appears, even before he knows who she is, in the image of a candle shining through frosted glass on a cold Moscow night, which reminds him of St. John's "light shining in darkness," the light of life itself. The first time he sees her she strikes him as dramatic and magnificent and instantly dispels his adolescent overscrupulosity about women and sex. Over and over again, she appears to him in figures of light or of nature, the most poignantly at a time when he is separated from her, a prisoner of the partisans, as a deep-rooted rowan tree, offering strong

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maternal arms and rich fruit to the hunted and the dispossessed. It is from the rowan tree that he takes his bearings for escape through the Siberian forest. Unlike Strelnikov, Zhivago is at ease with Lara as he is with life itself. "You could not communicate with life and existence," Zhivago thinks, "but she was their representative . . . in her the inarticulate principle of existence became sensitive and capable of speech." They love each other, and no other tie binds them; not marriage, nor ambition, nor timidity, nor any concern for the world of society and politics. "And you and I," Zhivago says to her, "are the last remembrance of all that immeasurable greatness that has been created in the world . . . . " He separates from Lara only in an attempt to save her life. She appears at his funeral. Later, it is casually mentioned that Lara was one of numerous anonymous victims who died in a concentration camp in Siberia.

In a beautiful early poem called "Lessons in English" Pasternak wrote of the meaning and dignity conferred on human suffering by symbolic forms, which are in turn the fruit of an historical community:

When Desdemona came to sing,—
So little time to live was left,—
Not of her lodestar love sang she,—
Of willow, willow, she lamented.

Desdemona plunges her grief into a symbol of grief that the suffering of others has already provided:

. . . . the darkest demon
Channeled for her a psalm of weeping brooks.

She offers herself in turn to a common suffering:

. . . . to soak
And stun with worlds the loving form.

In *Doctor Zhivago*, Pasternak repeatedly compares history and nature as things fundamentally akin. His landscapes are all human or humanized. The beauty of snow is defined in one memorable scene by the pleasure people take working in it. Zhivago, observing a butterfly, thinks of mimesis as a process similar to the action of the soul. There is a rhythm of life to which landscape and human beings respond equally; there is a communality adapting to the needs of life, as along the Siberian highway, "marriages and friendships connected village to village and town to town." It is men like Strelnikov, alienated from the life of nature, who plunge wilfully into the apocalypse:

> Filled with the loftiest aspirations from his childhood, he had looked upon the world as a vast arena where everyone competed for perfection, keeping scrupulously to the rules. When he found that this was not so, it did not occur to him that his conception of the world order might have been oversimplified. He nursed his grievance, and with it the

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> ambition to judge, between life and the dark forces that distorted it, and to be life's champion and avenger.

The revolution with its disruption of lives and meanings in the name of fanatical principles grates on Zhivago. "Politics doesn't appeal to me," he tells a Marxist—"I don't like people who don't care about the truth."

Meditating on the death of Strelnikov, Zhivago writes a curious poem about Christ's blasting of the fig tree. In the poem, Jesus is on his way to a meeting of disciples, which in anticipation rather depresses Him. The landscape is desolate, scrub bush and scorched rock. He sees a solitary fig tree, but it is without fruit, untrue to its nature. Something stirs in the tree as Jesus denounces it, and there is a moment of doubt, a moment of chance. "But a miracle is a miracle—and miracle is God." The tree is blasted. Thus the barren Strelnikov, confronted by his own judging Christ, shoots himself.

Zhivago, at a low point, looks back superstitiously to his initial response to the revolution:

> Only once in his life had this uncompromising language and single-mindedness filled him with enthusiasm. Was it possible that he must pay for that rash enthusiasm all his life by never hearing, year after year, anything but these unchanging, shrill, crazy exclamations and demands, which became progressively more impractical, meaningless and unfulfillable as time went by? Was it possible that because of one moment of overgenerous response he had been enslaved forever?

But even at the worst Zhivago retains a sense of underlying continuity, of nature working in man. The revolutionary slogans, like Antipov's pseudonymn, are transformed in the countryside into something strange, a half-gibberish that corresponds neither to the intent of their originators nor to the traditions of the past, but is the unforseeable result of the impact between them. The party proclamations assumed a new dimension by being pasted to the wall of an eighteenth century building, where the caryatides look into the street "as though all the women of the house had come out to stare." The revolution itself will undergo the sea-change of nature and history. It is not a finality. Zhivago wears away and dies, but his poems are preserved by his half-brother Evgraf, a mysterious figure "with narrow Kirghiz eyes," who represents the future promise of the unfulfilled hinterland, the deaf corners of formerly illiterate, unwashed Russia. In Zhivago's dreams, Evgraf seems to foreshadow his death, just as the growth of a new Soviet intelligentsia signifies the death of old Russia. Nevertheless, it is through Evgraf that Zhivago continues to live, that his poems can be read by men like Gordon and Dudorov, who, though misled by phrases and externally imposed rules while Zhivago still lived, though compromised by submission to the crassly practical, are now prepared through their own suffering and experience (they have both been in concentration camps, and through the Second World War) to grasp the meaning of Zhivago's verse. They look out over the city of Moscow as it quickens with spring, and they think of freedom.

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The current situation is such that one cannot conclude an assessment of *Doctor Zhivago* without a few words concerning the "Pasternak case"—that remarkable series of front-page incidents preceding and following the award to him of the Nobel Prize. It was perhaps inevitable that a book that cries out so eloquently against the politicization, the functionalization of life in our time, should have become so blatant a political issue; but surely it is a great irony. No book published in our generation has been felt so keenly by so many people as an event. In response to this excitement, the incredible vulgarity of a Soviet professional youth leader has almost been rivalled by the assured complacency of our own Secretary of State. Neither has read the book, but each is beautifully provided with emphatic conclusions. Whatever its faults, *Doctor Zhivago* is unquestionably the product of a great spirit, and we ought to feel it as criticism as much as comfort. I believe that the Soviet attacks have been directed not so much against Pasternak personally as against his sympathizers, actual and potential, within the USSR. In a sense, they are a more genuine tribute than our smug official praise for a purely imaginary political ally. Pasternak has met the attacks against him with great dignity. To the clamor that he leave the country, he replied: "For me this is unthinkable." He has survived forty years of the worst that can be brought to bear against a human being; and physical survival has been the least of it. He has remained invincibly himself ("The freest man I ever met," wrote an interviewer from the West), he has grown in unexpected ways, he has made nonsense of the world of 1984, and he comforts and condemns us all.

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MARY EMMA ELLIOTT, Managing Editor

Sworn to and subscribed before me this first day of October, 1958.

HAROLD P. GREENFIELD
Notary Public
(My commission expires March 30, 1959.)

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MARCUS KLEIN

Imps from Bottles, Etc.[1]

OF COURSE THERE IS NO Beat Generation, but there is an effort at refreshment at the springs of the kind of naivete of which in the long ago Booth Tarkington, say, drank deep. The rococo sensualities drop away, and there those fellows are, indeed part of a national tradition, but one proposed by Tarkington, by Eugene Field and James Whitcomb Riley. There is a freckle-faced kid who stalks through American literature, scaring the daylights out of everyone—and here he is again, and here is Kerouac again to celebrate him, his suspect naivete which is slipping constantly into real naivete. He is a young man of clean habits, for all the filth he picks up, and scrubbed mind, and he is in search of Maturity and Truth (the two are resolved into Sanskrit, in this instance), and there is something invigorating, Kerouac would say, in the spectacle of a boy briskly avoiding on his way all those pitfalls by which youth is indeed beset, the quicksands, for instance, of heterosexual sexual activity, Bohemians ("hanger-onners on the arts," parasites and phonies, not incipient hemen like us), and the commercial corruption of taste in this country ("And I'm bringing real chocolate pudding, not that instant phony stuff but good chocolate pudding that I'll bring to a boil and stir over the fire and then let it cool ice cold in the snow." "Oh boy!")—all of which, with the protagonist's lambent desire for transcendental self-extinction, would seem to be the effective content of *The Dharma Bums*. The book is about a couple of Kerouac fellows playing Zen, their sacramental fervor and their adventures by the way.

Kerouac is, of course, easy game, and it serves no purpose further to belay the ecstatic simplisms of which he is symbol, symptom, and claque, the inert drama he celebrates, and the impoverishment of idiom. It is only nostalgia for some post-World War I literary hijinks in Paris and New York that finds any real excitement in the San Franciso Renaissance. On the other hand, and despite the overt challenge, to 'look at me, I'm an American cultural phenomenon,' one needn't take the high aesthetic line. Kerouac is very funny and I think that finally it doesn't matter whether one laughs with him or at him. If one is sufficiently relaxed, behold! there he is performing some of the best deadpan rhetorical slapstick around. After all, it is only the high-minded and the liberal who are solemn before pratfalls.

[1] THE DHARMA BUMS, by *Jack Kerouac*. Viking. $3.95. THE HORN, by *John Clellon Holmes*. Random House. $3.75. THE VIOLATED, by *Vance Bourjaily*. Dial Press. $4.95. THE BRONC PEOPLE, by *William Eastlake*. Harcourt, Brace. $3.95. THE HOUSEBREAKER OF SHADY HILL AND OTHER STORIES, by *John Cheever*. Harper. $3.00. THE MAGIC BARREL, by *Bernard Malamud*. Farrar, Straus & Cudahy. $3.75. NABOKOV'S DOZEN, by *Vladimir Nabokov*. Doubleday. $3.50. THE HABIT OF LOVING, by *Doris Lessing*. Crowell. $4.00.

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Prophets have their troubles, but if one resists John Clellon Holmes, who is himself much more solemn about these matters of hip, beat, hot or cool, and adeptness in the mysteries, and who is at moments skillful with language, it is because the good news when you have it without the grosser awkwardness seems so stale. *The Horn* is historical pageantry, jazz in the thirties and forties as it happened around a figure who looks—I'm uninitiated—*au clef*, but it isn't that that makes it hoary. Rather it is that all that jazz gets lost in strenuous yea-saying rediscovery of an America that has been rediscovered before, and which, whatever validity it might once have had, is dated. It is Carl Van Vechten and Waldo Frank and Sherwood Anderson at his very worst and Hart Crane at his most Virgilian, all in pursuit of the American Myth and its fabulous alienated heroes. And sure enough, there are Melville and Thoreau and Whitman and Mark Twain and Poe and Emily Dickinson standing about as ornamental epigraphs to Holmes's chapters, lending their usable pastness, and there is the bit, just a bit, on the Mississippi, the items of popular culture done into "great Homeric clichés," the wounded American artist-hero (" . . . one of those sad, somehow crippled young Americans whom jazz alone has reconciled to his country. . . . "), the Dionysian joys of that reconciliation, and the incantatory prose.

It is unfortunate because this cliché-mongering obscures what is Holmes's real talent for involvement with his material, and his moments of adequacy to it. There are fine things in this novel—a withering portrait of the jazz *arriviste* who has been to Juilliard, a Negro musician who plays Kentucky Colonel to the ofays, an occasional fine concentration of dialogue—alas curded and whipped and lost in what turns out after all to be one of those phony instant chocolate puddings.

The real stuff, as those "crazy, profound Americans"—Holmes's words—would agree, is hard to come upon these days, but Bourjaily has, one feels, tasted of it and knows the labors it demands. *The Violated* is an impressive novel. The least that is to be said about it is that it is impressive in the way of Bourjaily's most strikingly realized character, an ugly duckling who does it the hard way and grows up to be not a swan but a bulldog, squat, tough, pertinacious, and in dead earnest. Aside from some cute tricks, which do and do not come off, Bourjaily does it the hard, dogged way, too, and with resolution which rejects rubber bones and demands flesh. Which is to say that he is seriously responsive to character and situation and that he is patient with complexity in the way that one would like to ascribe to the pleasant notion of the grand tradition. Despite, by the way, the implied deadweight of clinical significance of the title. Despite it, the novel's quartet of protagonists manage their own identities and through a recent thirty years of precise history, public and private, achieve their own terrifying, normal neuroses and their dead ends, which is what the novel is about.

The cute trick which spectacularly does come off is a children's production of *Hamlet*, used to frame the action and to provide the madness with mythical method. It is a fine, grotesque, and resonant invention, and

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Bourjaily plays it any number of ways. The performance of the play, in the dark loft of an abandoned Brooklyn tenement, child actors of this terrific depravity before an audience of Claudiuses and Gertrudes, is all ripeness, juice, and compression, a wonderful stroke. On the other hand, Bourjaily too struggles at moments to fake a meaningfulness that the action only longs for. When the author steps forward to say "Youth longs for catastrophe as it longs for love," he is a psychologized medicine man come to squeeze a turnip—as well as F. Scott Fitzgerald when F. Scott Fitzgerald was very young. Of the same order are the pre-adolescent sexual traumas meretriciously popped into place to poison a psyche. The novelist's business is the real texture of life that the behavioral scientists can never know. Still less convincing, it seems to me, is the primitivism, the old Hemingway striptease, that Bourjaily offers tentatively as a cure for violation and for our time. It's so very easy and so very inadequate. One wishes he had said, as indeed he does for a moment seem to say, that this disease is fatal, and then left it at that.

But these are objections certainly of secondary importance as against a novel which in six hundred pages and which with much opportunity, seldom cheats, and which weighs its own weight in simple terms of action and character. There are within, moreover, for those of us who keep score at home, areas of great virtuosity: Bourjaily is fine with matters like the nausea of sex, *passim*, the instant of buckling, the fog of numbed response and forgetful yearning in the mind of a young alcoholic, and with the real grapple of the real moment of history. It is satisfying work.

The Bronc People, a Western which mocks itself in informative ways and which is a fine and elaborate joke, has other satisfactions. Unfortunately the mockery seems sometimes the counter of uncertainty. Eastlake, briefly, sets into motion Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn (a Negro foundling in this incarnation) against a West which is a paradox of the convention of its past, which has its gunfights, but they are confused and absurd affairs, its big silent ranchers, but they collect butterflies, its bronc-busters, but theirs is a commercial grandeur, its badmen, but they turn out to be sentimental and homosexual, its frontier relics who find themselves in subtle ways the captives of the conquered Indian, and the Indians themselves, inhabiting a point of time equidistant between New Mexico and Chicago, who provide a chorus of languorous, insouciant mockeries. Who provide, too, much corn—an Indian boy named The Other Indian, with consequent contretemps; the phenomenon, in the Negro foundling, of a black white boy; the dead Indian incinerated in solemn rites with a bottle of Four Roses; and the Indians who come to the bier expecting beer. The ironies and the corn are further subserved by a series of literary parodies—I count Hemingway, Faulkner, and Lawrence, but I may be missing some.

This is, of course, intricate cookery—compliments to the chef—and it is marvelous that it is coherent at all. Eastlake uses this world, at the end, gently and with patience, and then with that deep and tender irony that works on itself and on all things and that is done only at the last shift and for lack of time to go on. But these uses have their limitations. A few years

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ago in these pages Eastlake printed a good story which started out as savage parody and then, forced, one felt, by its system of ironies, ended by leaving its victim a wound *and* a bow and a tragic heroism in his loneliness. Perhaps that isn't just where Eastlake wanted him to go. So in this novel there are times when one feels that the system frustrates the author and begins to play for itself. Which is to say that there are moments when one is irritated by Eastlake's stylistic self-indulgences. There is, for instance, a cute little play on the words "adaption"-"adoption," twisting, dancing, glimmering, on tippy-toe, curtsying, feinting, winking, carried on from chapter to chapter until one wants to choke the damned words out of the book. And one is amazed to see puns jumping between dialogues and the straightest exposition, and then one is not so amazed after all to find that much that was promising ends in the puns for which it was apparently invented. It is a matter of tact. When Eastlake has it, as assuredly he usually does, this is intriguing stuff. When not, not.

That is not to say that the point of the book is its own verbal fabric—only that that is the case when Eastlake is uncertain of his own ideas. His ideas have to do with courage and acceptance, the courage to accept alone one's own paradoxical fate, which is what the Indians have, the mythic West had, and what the young initiates have to learn. It is *l'affaire Hemingway* again—no less pertinent for that—or is for Eastlake. Hemingway seems for years to have been a special problem for him. And the geometric progression of his tender ironies has apparently been his freedom. Freedom, it happens, contains its own paradoxes of constraint.

Back East again, and to turn to shorter fiction. There is first of all John Cheever, the gentle housebreaker of Shady Hill. It is the other John Cheever. That expert safecracker comes to mind, who a few years ago went straight and took to writing about his expertise and to helping the cops. What a waste! His occupation gone, and the pity of it, to fool away one's talents for the cool kiss of the antiseptic readers of gangland confession. For "gangland confession" read *The New Yorker*, and we are back to Cheever. Cheever's talents are simply prodigious, the sureness of his touch incredible—its comprehension faultless, supple, the art subtle, fathomless, and capable of a lyric grace that does take your breath away.

But these stories are dull, and the more peculiarly because they are written out of warm and respectable love, and sane, quiet courage, saying that Shady Hill, the suburban setting and really the point of all these stories, of course, does have its greenery. ("Shady Hill is, as I say, a *banlieue* and open to criticism by city planners, adventurers, and lyric poets, but if you work in the city and have children to raise, I can't think of a better place. My neighbors are rich, it is true, but riches in this case mean leisure, and they use their time wisely.") Truth. One grows up to bite the nearest bourgeois, in our case and moment the sub-ex-urbanite, but everybody's mother was wise when she said don't laugh at money, you'll want to live in a nice neighborhood. There *is* another side, and it takes some wisdom and some daring to affirm it. If Shady Hill is, admittedly, not Arden, still one wouldn't want to be Jacques.

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The trouble, in a word, is that Cheever won't be Touchstone, either. There are real devils in Shady Hill, and Cheever has glimpses of them, but then in the next instant something happens, they turn out to be just cute little devils after all, or that *New Yorker* sort of understated placidity descends to frustrate a climax, or a poultice is applied and look, they are as white as snow and all is, if not forgiven, at least placed in that perspective where it can be forgotten. That terrible placidity, masquerading as tragic calm. The housebreaker of the title story—neither the best nor the worst story of the lot—nice fellow, young, family man, lives in Shady Hill, has financial troubles, repents, returns his neighbor's wallet, and feels much better. One so wishes that he had kept the money, or kept it longer, or that in any way, some way, he had known the real agony of conscience and need before he submitted to a largely untested moral dictum. No reason why Raskolnikov should not live in the suburbs, but he had better be Raskolnikov and have the emotional capacity for real strife and real terror, and then strength for resolution. One has the feeling that Cheever just won't let Raskolnikov happen, that he won't let his story go its own way and live out its own experience. It is not that the floor is not strewn with guts and sawdust, that the melodramatic implications are not indulged—in other stories, in fact, they are—that makes our housebreaker so mild and meaningless a beast. He never has a chance to make anything but the mildest pass towards meaningfulness. Hero gets scratched and hero gets a bandaid. In fact the real incision occurs, or almost occurs, once in this collection, in "The Country Husband," about a middle-aged rebellion that finds its possibilities in the baby-sitter and that does run its course through itch, absurdity, and agony, but this story too submits finally to a coda of domestic usualness which might be ironic but which is actually one of those devices of perspective by which the action is disvalued. The commuting train is once more true to its restful rhythms, the squirrels return to rob the bird-feeding station, and as for the country husband and his renegade passion, it was just one of those things, we understand. Turns out the country husband doesn't bite, he was just showing off his store teeth.

Race, moment, and *banlieue*. Malamud is elsewhere, his skill less flexible and his knowledge more parochial than Cheever's, but on the other hand he knows what he knows—not even Jewish life, really, but the imperatives of suffering and pity as they happen to be postulated for him by Jewish life. Not even Jewish life because his people exist not in society but in romance. (It is, as Richard Chase points out, the American tradition.) These are Saints' Lives, making, now that these stories are together, a kind of Yiddish *Golden Legend*. Their equipment is small miracles, exemplary passions, a scattering of marvels, and belief, and at their best they have a purity and a concentration which Malamud's novel of last year, *The Assistant*, for all its fine qualities, did not achieve. The least furnished of these stories seem to be the very best: "The Mourners," about a lonely, irascible old Jew whose single, enigmatic act of mourning is so powerful that it forces the wicked, the flinty-hearted landlord, to his own wail of

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atonement and so to communion; "The Girl of My Dreams," about one of those angry, frustrated, young Jewish intellectuals and the apparition to him of love in a fat and sad old lady ("Eat, she says, "it's self-expression"); "Take Pity" which, though marred by a bizarre and irrelevant setting in the obscure heaven of the Jews, with some absolute of economy says as much as one is likely to know about pity. The success of these stories is in fact in inverse proportion to their intricacy—the title story, which has admirers, seems to me long on symbolisms but short on real intensity—and there are some experiments in worldliness which are, finally, simplistic without being simple. No doubt Malamud seeks extension and a broader reality, a wholesome thing, but it is still his intimate and fabulous image of grace that makes him the exciting writer he is.

Nabokov's excitement is his range, precisely, the fireworks and the profusion of language, the dulcet glides, the agile command of genres, the versatility and complexity and the precarious balances of feeling. The thirteen stories of this *Dozen* extend from that sort of exotic memoir which seems to have been invented by *The New Yorker*, for which *The New Yorker* anyway is the market, to nostalgia of the future subserved by the devices of science fiction, to ironies of political commentary, to psychological suspense stuff, to utterances which, happily, are not to be summarized. The memoirs—there are two of them—partake of a form for connoisseurs. The futuristic pieces—two of them—seem to me to justify Nabokov's own insinuated apprehensions, to sink under the trappings of space ships, galaxies, curious biology, and the rest of it. But the other stories, written between 1931 and 1952, if they never concentrate into the old Falstaffian nympholept himself, go some way towards explaining the possibility of *Lolita*, and more is to be said for no talent.

There is the trade in monsters, monsters leaking their humanity like sieves, there is the ambience and odor of souring romance, there is the baffled Kafkaesque loneliness, there is the virtuosity of jealousy, there are the witty parentheses and there is the arch fantasy. Much more important, there is the rare accuracy, just so much of sorrowing and just so much of scrutiny, which is what we mean by compassion, that compassion which, brought to astonishing equilibrium, is what so distinguishes *Lolita* as one of the few novels by which this decade will deserve to be celebrated. The pieces of this collection accomplish it with varying success, the best of them " 'That in Aleppo Once . . . ,' " a story of jealousy made of a confusion of military invasion, *fonctionnaires*, and a dreaming, unreal Desdemona; "The Assistant Producer," comic opera which moves the stagey props of counter-revolution of the Czarist exiles, and brings the exiles neatly to their comic, pathetic end, and "Conversation Piece: 1945," which faces a post-war Nazi with a comprehension and a steadiness of hate matched, it happens, just once in this season's product—in a long story in Doris Lessing's *The Habit of Loving*, called "The Eye of God in Paradise," about the pleasant German land and the echo of heavy, black-booted, marching feet. Doris Lessing is a pro, too.

But first read *Lolita*.

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ROBERT MARTIN ADAMS

Man and Nothing: Earthbound Comments

THREE BOOKS ON MAN and his current problems[1] constitute a mithridate to harden any reader against any hardship. The somber tone of these tomes is not surprising. I think there is something automatic about the rhetoric for discussing The Fate of Man or Humanity's Latest Dilemma which makes it impossible to remember that cakes and ale still survive, and ginger is still hot i' th' mouth, too. At all events, one emerges from these exercises in mopery with an odd, cheerful sense of having given the devil both wind and sun, and still got off with one's weasand unslit—or is this sort of brag always premature?

By all odds the best, worst, and most deeply involving of these Jeremiads is a strong, bad, brown volume which sets out to tell us "simply" what we are all doing. Naturally, the way to explain this matter leads through the pre-Socratic philosophers; and Miss Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* shrinks from no strenuosity however anfractuous. It is a fine example of an old German tradition, according to which the business of the philosopher is just to think, to overpower problems by sheer brain-power and force of abstract intellect. Of course there is a danger that one will overpower the reader as well, or even first. Miss Arendt's is almost too successful an instance of thought self-generated and self-propelled; I am afraid a good many readers will be left, like myself, in the wake of the great stir and commotion, calling out "Hey, waitaminute!" For Miss Arendt's gift in setting forth the overpowering generalization is matched by an equal talent for propounding abstractions abstracted from abstractness itself. Having created her categories with a razor, she applies them with a bulldozer; and so moves down the highway of superb categorical assertion with the serene momentum of one of our larger rivers. Her discussion alternates between the Greek philosophers and the modern labor movement, using each to hold up a mirror to the other. When, occasionally, an historical fact is needed, it is likely to come from philology; when "modern science" needs a spokesman, it turns out to be Wernher von Braun. This does not matter much, I am sure. Miss Arendt's history could come from Nostradamus and her science from Velikovsky without widening appreciably the gap between fact and theory.

The book treats of the active life, which Miss Arendt divides into sections subtitled "Labor," "Work," and "Action." On the whole these three divisions represent categories of ascending dignity in Miss Arendt's

[1] THE HUMAN CONDITION, by *Hannah Arendt*. University of Chicago Press. $4.75. IRRATIONAL MAN, by *William Barrett*. Doubleday. $5.00. NATURE, MAN, AND WOMAN, by *Alan W. Watts*. Pantheon. $3.95.

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scale of values. Labor is "productive consumption," "man's metabolism with nature" (the phrases are from Marx), and so essentially solitary in its nature (though generally performed in groups) and morbidly impermanent in its products. Work, on the other hand, is the creation of objects designed for use, not consumption; it creates a permanent world, and is, indeed, worldly, in Miss Arendt's categories, as opposed to labor, which is, I am afraid, worldless. Speech and action, which together comprise the "Action" section of the Active Life, are processes by which man works in a social context on his fellow-man; so that they are not only worldly but create a world of appearances which is reality itself (I compress the argument a little, for the sake of brevity). All these ideas about the nature of the active life are, of course, related to a series of shifting lines between the private and the public life, between eternity and immortality, between freedom and necessity, and between numerous other abstract antinomies.

To parody the book in this way is grossly unfair; but it is a kind of revenge to which one is driven by the unfairness of the book itself. For Miss Arendt demonstrates nothing; she announces. Some of what she announces is transparently silly, mere brain-cobwebs; a great deal else which she says is interesting and suggestive, and might even prove to be true if one had any means of verifying it; and finally, there are, here and there, patterns of assertion built out of more-or-less sufficient facts, and beautifully articulated to give one the impression of an athletic mind working with immense perspectives, genuine learning, and brilliant originality. As for discriminating among these materials, it is up to the reader; every part of the book is written in the same positive, unqualified style. Perhaps I do Miss Arendt an injustice; but memory does not retain a single passage, in 325 pages of generalization, where she has said, "About this subject we do not know, in this area we cannot be sure."

In short, to read Miss Arendt's book satisfactorily, one would have to start by knowing more about the subject than she does. Then, indeed, one might estimate how much of the book is based on a subject-matter, and how much on ideological bridgework. The present reviewer is in no position to undertake this survey; it may be enough simply to present a sample of each level of Miss Arendt's work.

Silly: Rousseau, who first explored intimacy, "is the only great author still frequently cited by his first name alone" (p. 39). Cf. Dante, Galileo, Saint Thomas, Jane Austen.

Brain-cobwebs: "the very fact that so great an enterprise as the Trojan War could have been forgotten without a poet to immortalize it several hundred years later offered only too good an example of what could happen to human greatness if it had nothing but poets to rely on for its permanence" (p. 197).

Unverifiable: "The astonishing flowering of poetry and music from the middle of the eighteenth century until almost the last third of the nineteenth, accompanied by the rise of the novel, the only entirely social art form, coinciding with a no less striking decline of all the more public

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arts, especially architecture, is sufficient testimony to a close relationship between the social and the intimate" (p. 39).

Brilliant: The contrast between Greek and Roman "liberalism" in the matter of slavery; though it "could, under certain circumstances, result in very prosperous and highly educated slaves, [it] meant only that to be prosperous had no reality in the Greek *polis* and to be a philosopher was without much consequence in the Roman republic" (p. 59).

As far as the contemporary human condition is concerned, Miss Arendt's position seems to be that the industrial revolution has replaced all workmanship with labor (p. 124), while the common space of appearance, in which word and deed are possible, has disappeared for most if not all modern men. Scientists now can occasionally act, and a few isolated individuals continue to think; but in the greatest reversal of history, contemplation has been cast aside and labor is now glorified as the supreme activity of man. Having achieved this rather familiar vision of mass society as an anxious mob, alone and meaningless, Miss Arendt gently lets us down in familiar territory; leaving us, perhaps, a bit puzzled as to why we had to go such a long way around to reach such a commonplace conclusion. As someone who daily labors, works, speaks and acts, I do not find much difference in life now that it appears I am in three different stadia of existence; and I could still use a good description of what it is that we are actually doing. But Miss Arendt's book was a thick and *Dinglich* experience, and the journey, though rough and difficult, was lit by glimpses and fragments of insight for which one can only be grateful.

The degradation of the contemplative life and the undervaluing of abstract, disinterested thought are accepted terms in which to bewail the decadence of our times. But by altering the rhetoric a little, one can use the same *topoi* to show that modern philosophy has abandoned its outworn ivory tower and started to face up to the existential crisis of the ages. This line of thought leads to the same despondencies and dreads outlined by Miss Arendt, but avails itself of a richer vocabulary and some readymade categories which make the job of the deplorer a good deal easier. Mr. William Barrett's *Irrational Man* takes this tack.

As a late leaf on the tree of existentialism, Mr. Barrett's book is a pretty familiar experience. In form a series of lectures, it retains to an almost irritating degree the classroom's simple, declarative sentence-structure, and *Encyclopedia-Britannica* factualness, varied with occasional ventures into the academic picturesque.

> After St. Thomas, *Duns Scotus* (1265?-1308) advocated a doctrine that went contrary to the Thomists (p. 88).
>
> Goethe in *Faust* was every bit as much at odds with conventional morality as was Nietzsche, but the old diplomatic fox of Weimar was a more tactful and better-balanced man, etc. (p. 169).

This is clearly philosophic history on the Will Durant level, with the special advantage that it can be about just anybody. Mr. Barrett's history includes a quick run through philosophy from *Tertullian* (150-225) to

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Duns Scotus, Pascal, *Gulliver's Travels*, Baudelaire, Tolstoy, and other precursors of existential thought. There is a chapter on modern art, but jazz is unjustly neglected; for if Baudelaire and Mondrian were philosophers, there is clearly no reason to deny the title to Charlie (Yardbird) Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. Mr. Barrett's book is interesting as an evidence of what the history of philosophy looks like to a rather earnest, literal person who has become addicted to an exceedingly foggy brand of German metaphysics and determined to look for exponents of his views wherever they can be found. I am not sure that its sturdy confidence in the dichotomy of Existenz and Sein and in the perennial fascination of Dread and Nothingness do not yield it the charm of a period-piece. For those who do not wish to bother with the history, fifty pages of conclusions are conveniently placed at the front of the book.

Mr. Barrett wallows through the many forms taken by the Dilemma of Our Day, in the happy confidence that there are better ways to understand things than by just thinking about them. His recommendation that we immerse ourselves in the thinginess of things has, as he recognizes, Oriental overtones; but the Oriental perspective is difficult and the rhetoric unfamiliar, hence the Western tradition must be adapted (most of the major philosophers excised, and replaced by poets and novelists) to the needs of our time. Mr. Alan Watts, however, knows that an unfamiliar jargon is all the better for its unfamiliarity; as one of our leading Zen-peddlers, unfamiliar jargon has long been his stock in trade. But his latest book adds to it an indispensable ingredient, long missing from the philosopher's dispensary, the enchanting idea of sex.

From the traditional point of view, one of the more impressive vulgarizations of any philosophy would be the application to it of the criterion, Does it improve my performance in bed? Mr. Watts has negotiated this descent into the Avernus of bathos not only successfully but deliberately. From one point of view, this qualifies him to compete in the vulgarity-finals with Norvel the hyper-concentration guy, and Dr. Norman Vincent Peale. On the other hand—to give Mr. Watts his due—sex is quite as good a test of one's Zen-understanding as archery, and is likely to sell a great many more books. The real trouble is not formal; it is that Mr. Watts is a too-glib and too-persuasive writer, with just enough *expertise* to make his passage easy through Oriental philosophy, and a glossy moral tone to put on when talking about the birds, the flowers, the love of nature and of woman. It is clear that he could sell me snake-oil against the day I develop rheumatism; but I think I would know, even as I bought it, that this was an artist in snow.

For the fact is that what he has to peddle here is a Buddhist cream-pie, a selection of picturesque properties and postures without the network of beliefs which validates them. For instance, he slurs over the elementary textbook facts that the desirability of nirvana is central to Buddhism, that nirvana may or may not be annihilation, and that, while the Western mind can adapt either to nihilism or to an afterlife, it cannot remain indifferent, as the Buddhist can, to the issue of personal survival. In Bud-

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dhism the issue matters hardly at all because metempsychosis makes the human personality itself a temporary vestment. But metempsychosis is a hard doctrine to sell, so Mr. Watts ignores it. To suggest, as he does, that we can put on the habits and manners of Buddhism without a more radical abdication of self than the Western mind can conceive is to trifle with the simplicities of the half-educated and desperate.

As to specific recommendations, a very limited acquaintance with the Zen-gambit will enable one to anticipate their general nature, and no doubt even the application which Mr. Watts proposes to the art of copulation. Emptiness, absence of striving, relaxation of conscious intent, Tantric samsara, the peace and quiet of the absolute—these and the like of these make up the drill. The only thing I can imagine more strained and unnatural than sex as he describes it is the twitching, white-faced casualness of Ivy-league freshmen during fraternity rushing.

Zen in America represents a fine line of chatter for cocktail parties and an ideal consolation for television-executives; for all I know, it may be as successful as dianetics in leading disturbed souls to cosmic peace. But in its essential workings, it is a fake-religion, offering all the high-sounding, self-important, self-approving terminology without any of the intellectual clarity or spiritual rigor of the real article. And hitching it to sex is a kind of fouling the waters of life for which I can only hope that Mr. Watts will be shown mercy somewhere.

The current vogue for emptiness which these three volumes variously exemplify calls for a few words in itself. I am not so naive as to deny its powerful attractions for our age, or to suppose that this great void in things is not the typical modern experience. Henry Moore has given us the best artistic image of modern man, as a Swiss cheese. The great experiments of the age have to do with weightlessness, anaesthesia, and the interruption of the sense-continuum; the popular ideal of the day is to get out of this world—not into another one, just out of this. We read *Ulysses* and relish *Madame Bovary* precisely for the sense they convey that under the hard carapace, the brilliant show of technical virtuosity, lies simply—Charles's hat, "one of those wretched things whose mute hideousness suggest unplumbed depths, like an idiot's face." So with Beckett, so with Ionesco—*nada y nada y pues nada*. Nothingness is ultimate, and we are avid for ultimates. But the only game that has so far been played around the idea of Nothing is strictly a shell game—that is, the rewards are nil, as one would expect, and the variety of the game itself diminishes as it becomes clear that there is never a pea under the shell one picks—this is the condition of one's being allowed to pick it.

Conceivably there is no alternative to this view of Nothingness; being at the soul of man (Swift and Baudelaire have told us so), it is the human condition. We may choose our emotional correlates from stoicism and self-pity, from the high, hysterical giggle of the Zenster or the slack-jawed openness of the beat, but no real option in the human condition is available to us. Such a conclusion, however, is acceptable only as it comes from people who have not been hunting for it; and the person who hunts for it

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betrays, by that fact alone, that he does not know what it is. A man who really despairs has no business writing books which recommend despair—it is a frivolous action. Every minute he is not busy with rope or razor is a minute wasted. In the face of Nothing, as in the face of the infinite, we are poured out like water. Writing a book or attending a play leads us back to a limited structure of appearances, if not of relations; a humanism, as it were, of the implicit intent. If Descartes could deduce existence from thinking, I can deduce a lot more than that from writing.

So that Nothing is really with us all the time, in little corners and pockets of existence; and the casual man (he is merely the man who has adjusted to his own threshold of anxiety) greets it without surprise or enthusiasm. He organizes no rituals around it, sheds no tears over his hard fate, indulges in no twisted smiles of heroic resignation, makes no categorical decisions about whether the situation is tragic or comic—in a small human way he pursues his human ends. Sometimes in the middle of a book on the Fate of Mankind, *nada* opens before him for twenty pages on end; but either he emerges or he fails to emerge; and somehow as he goes along there are always cakes and ale, and ginger is still hot i' th' mouth, too. And for the man who does not insist on smothering himself in gray gelatine, there is every so often the chance to "stand right fronting and face to face to a fact." When this happens, I hear tell, "you will see the sun glimmer on both its surfaces, as if it were a scimitar, and feel its sweet edge dividing you through the heart and marrow, and so you will happily conclude your mortal career." It seems like an end worth trying for.

ANTHONY HECHT

A Word from the Scullery

The readers and the hearers like my books,
But yet some writers cannot them digest.
But what care I? For when I make a feast,
I would my guests should praise it, not the cooks.

—Sir John Harington, 1618

When the powers that play upon our lives seem unusually vast and inhuman; when values have their authority only under limited and freely exchangeable visions of life; when individuals are desperate to discover their identities and have no clue but statistics; then impudence is taken for courage, and irreverence for manly independence. It is true that nobody walks down our streets leading a live lobster on a leash of pink ribbon, but our tastes for this sort of thing are still active. Enid Starkie was writing in 1944 about the eccentrics of the eighteen-thirties, and Dr. Edith Sitwell has just given us a book on the English eccentrics. *Auntie Mame* is a smash hit, and, in another way, so is *Howl*. It is liberating even

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to be able to admire these free spirits; and what if it could be shown that what seems like their naughtiness is really, paradoxically, a sign of their goodness? So that Baudelaire might be restored to the very bosom of the church, and might presently become the patron saint of blasphemers. Clearly those innocent emancipators who started out mainly to shock the bourgeois had got hold of something more powerful and complex than they realized. A lover's ruthless indifference to the feelings of the women he seduces is a sign that he is one of the few who have that energetic potency and demanding vitality that would make him sexually attractive: his ultimate indifference proves his insatiability, his overmastering virility. Let thieves, perverts and idlers be our heroes, then, for they are "honest" men who will not be coerced by the trumped-up conventions of society. By these lights, any assault on what passes for good taste is a blow struck for freedom; and deliberate vulgarity becomes an admirable way of life. When this can be done with both humor and compassion, we may have great works like *Moll Flanders* and *The Beggar's Opera*. When the compassion is missing we may still have the witty, though sometimes pointless, epigrams of Oscar Wilde. Now, inverted pieties can become a chic and easy way of dealing with the world; yet who is to say at what point this famous posture loses its human shape? Who, I mean, can say this without sounding like a narrow moralist?

Consider, for example, a new volume of poems by Louis MacNeice.[1] He is a deft and accomplished artist, and his tone is often one of lightness and banter, even about serious matters, and with all the irony that is implied by treating such matters in so airy and agile a way. Who could not be delighted by the opening of the title poem?

Never so lithe in the green dingle,
Never so ripe in the grown hay,
The ghosts of pastoral tease and mingle
With darker ghosts from that dark day
Which means our own. Your own? they say;
How can you prove your minds are single
Or, muted words from worlds away
Setting both ears and nerves a-tingle,
Tell what your ears and nerves obey?

Never so young in their green fettle,
Never so glad in their gleaned light,
Never so proud in pulse and petal,
So much themselves in despite of spite,
Look, they come back; and, burning bright,
Turn roof and tree to dazzling metal
Transmuting all our greys to white
And, when our night begins to settle,
Divulge their day to shame our night.

This is gay and wistful and charming. And the next stanza goes on to

[1] VISITATIONS, by *Louis MacNeice*. Oxford. $3.00.

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suggest that the world those ghosts celebrate is not beyond recovery, for,

They pipe us yet where birds are flying
Beyond the ridge to lands unknown
Where we, once come, could boast when dying
We had not always lived alone.

We had better watch our step in this fluid world of metaphor. If he is saying no more than that the imagination can possess the past and be enriched by it, this is not very marvelous, though it is very nicely said. But if our coming "to lands unknown" means a transmutation in us, as well as in the past, then the language that is used has not only an alchemical but a Pied-Piper-of-Hamlin quality, and we are left on very uncertain footing. Magic has moved in without warning. This in itself would not be very troubling, and we could concede that the poet wanted to leave this moot; except for the second part of the poem, in which by some divine or Celtic metaphysic, all paradoxes are resolved and all antinomies synthesized.

When the indefinable
Moment apprises
Man of Its presence,
Shorn of disguises
Himself in his essence
Combines and comprises
The uncombinable.
. . . . . .
When the unobtainable
Seeming-distaining
Vision is captured,
Beyond explaining
He can but, enraptured,
Accept this regaining
The unregainable.

Now it is true that this passage echoes T. S. Eliot's "Ash Wednesday," but it is also true that if the tone has something of Eliot, it has much more of Billy Graham, for Eliot is talking about a single miraculous figure, while MacNeice is talking about universal, instant and gratuitous salvation. Just how we have gotten to this mystical unity from our beginning with those playful pastoral ghosts is never made explicit in the poem; and while it is true that poets prefer to imply their meanings rather than state them flat-footedly, it seems to me that what has happened in the poem is too complicated and important to be dealt with by a touch of the magic wand or enchanted pipe. There is a chic and unconvincing religiosity in some of these poems, which is at the same time cheap and vulgar; and the last poem in the book presents us with the spectacle of God sitting in a bar, watching, as it were, on television, an atom bomb explode and destroy all creation. There is even a poem that begins

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Although we say we disbelieve,
God comes in handy when we swear—

and goes on to the following conclusion,

That God exists we cannot show,
So do not know but need not care.
Thank God we do not know; we know
We need the unknown. The Unknown is There.

And what conclusions may we draw? Acknowledging that MacNeice is an accomplished artist, may we say that these ironies and paradoxes are unpersuasive? Or that thay are unwholesome? And if we are unpersuaded, is it because the way that MacNeice views the world is in itself a style, gingerly, sophisticated and removed; full of an educated distrust of grandiosity and the false notes struck in so many causes, even personal ones? The answer to these questions is at least partly a moral one, and perhaps has no place in a book review. But when a poet of such skill fails to realize an important theme, the interested and serious reader wonders why.

John Heath-Stubbs opens his book[2] with a courageous exhortation to his own poetry:

Disdain, my verse, the language of the age:

And it does. And not only of this age, but of any age of English poetry I can think of. Mr. Heath-Stubbs seems to identify himself with the sensibility of the Augustans in their most classic attitudes; and the poem referred to above goes on to say,

Be cold, be hard, impersonal as stone,
Or only use that argot for your rage.

Now certainly most of these poems are cold and impersonal, and those which are not are slightly embarrassing (without, I think, intending to be) but a stern and classic grandeur has been lost along the way by the use of more cumbersome and maladroit inversions than one is likely to find in anything but fifth-rate doggerel verse. Here are a few:

And here, on Pharos' isle detained,
She all those war-torn years remained; . . . .

Porphyry and Plotinus gone,
(The alone have fled to the Alone)—
Their tranquil wisdom who shall guess?

To you confided like a bride
Her twilit secrets Carcassonne.

Inversions, of course, are not merely old-fashioned; they can be and have been used with stunning effect by modern poets. But here we have no more than a ruthless disregard of the decencies of English syntax which

[2] THE TRIUMPH OF THE MUSE, by *John Heath-Stubbs*. Oxford. $3.00.

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is far from Augustan. It is as if his imperiously icy views cut him off from his subject matter even when he was clearly well disposed towards it. This is neither tact nor refinement, but a very special sort of educated clumsiness. And his disdain may, after all, be a hollow self-reproach.

The best poem in this book is the title poem, in which, all references to Swift and Archilochus and Pindar being put aside, the true poetic paternity of Byron shines clearly through. It is a mock Divine Comedy, in six short cantos; and it imagines the poet, Mr. Heath-Stubbs himself, summoned in his sleep by the ghost of Sigmund Freud to go on a miraculous journey to the Muse's hall. Here he sees all the great poets of the past, and has an appropriate epithet for each one. They are there to witness the presentation of new candidates to join their immortal ranks. The first two to be accepted by the Muse are T. S. Eliot and Edith Sitwell, the first withdrawing to sit in the dust at Dante's feet, the second joining Sappho and Vittoria Colonna. Roy Campbell is admitted and directed to a seat near Dryden. It then turns out that four "bright boys" who were supposed to be there, were too busy with cultural activities on either side of the Atlantic, and therefore are summarily dismissed by the Muse as being not sufficiently committed to their high calling. After a little more of this sort of thing, Heath-Stubbs, who has been a spectator throughout, remarks,

> *Imagine, then, my embarrassment and fear*
> *When, as the heralds once more blew their cornets,*
> *I heard my own name called, in summons clear.*

Fortunately for us, he wakes up before any decision is made in his case; but it is not quite soon enough. The joke by now has wearied, and the poem has gone stale, and the ghost of Sigmund Freud is no longer around to interpret that dream.

On the other hand, I recommend with enthusiasm the books of three young poets: May Swenson, David Wagoner, and Donald Hall.[3] Miss Swenson's gift is in the emblematic tradition; not in the sense that she is old-fashioned, but that her mode of regarding the world, immediate, visual, dense and careful as it is, hints at correspondence beyond our first perceptions. In a way, one may see this as formulaic, and it would be possible to work out simple equations for some of her poems: the word "beautiful" = the caterpillar; the bird = the music box; the lover = the horse; the sea = cattle; etc. This could be no more than clever, and it does happen at times that the ingenuity runs away with the poem. Nevertheless, she is a poet not only of skill but of reticence and depth, and often enough she leaves us peering into two worlds, sadly, irritably, or desperately uncertain as to which is the real or the more important one. And sometimes a mysterious third possibility is suggested. Rather than read one of her poems here, reprinted with no royalties to her, buy her book.

David Wagoner writes an intense and lyric poetry that sometimes be-

[3] A CAGE OF SPINES, by *May Swenson*. Rinehart. $3.75. A PLACE TO STAND' by *David Wagoner*. Indiana University Press. $2.75. THE DARK HOUSES, by *Donald Hall*. Viking. $3.00.

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comes mannered and apocalyptic, and sometimes sings in a borrowed voice, but is usually his own and under control, and is capable of this:

An old, rich rain comes down
On the hummocks of the dead
And the side-slipped valley at dawn,

And all the stones are one.
The rill-worn, pocked and angular
Moon-like rock on the wane

And the crushed shale
Are one in the rain that prays . . .

as well as this:

What are you wearing? "Snow."
Send two feet after two
On the glazed meadow
Past small fire and rue,
The turf and the bracken.

How are you feeling? "Frail."
As to a festival,
Bring kex and darnel
For turf and the fire's meal,
The rue and the bracken.

Where will you find them? "There."
Step softly where they are:
Ice is not a stranger
Than bracken and small fire,
Than turf and rue. . . .

These are fragments, and being quoted thus, are not just to the poems from which they are taken. But they can at least show a delight in language, and a singing quality that remembers the sixteenth century as well as later lyricists.

Donald Hall's first book was the Lamont Poetry Selection for 1955, and was generously praised everywhere. It was a book of great charm and wit, its assurance and amusement always apparent. The present volume in comparison might be thought solemn. It is, rather, a superbly brave attempt not to repeat the triumph of the first book but to try for something even more difficult: a steady and appraising vision which is earned in art as in life only at great cost. It can be said of him that in trying to keep his balance about difficult subjects he sometimes attains to flatness; and this seems to me true of the elegy for his father. It can also be said that a poem called "The Family" is one of the most carefully horrifying poems to have been written in some time. The word for this book is not "earnest," though "free spirits" might regard it as such: earthbound, concerned. And those "free spirits" could undoubtedly show that my tastes were those of a moralist.

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Notes on Contributors (*cont.*)

S. P. BOVIE, an Associate Professor of Classics at Indiana University, has published a book of translations of Virgil's *Georgics* and is the author of the forthcoming translation of *The Satires and Epistles of Horace*, to be brought out this spring by the University of Chicago Press.

LAWRENCE SARGENT HALL owns and operates a boatyard on Orr's Island, Maine, and teaches English at Bowdoin College. "The Ledge" is his first published story.

ANN STANFORD, who is on the staff of the University of California at Los Angeles, published her third book, *Magellan*, last spring. This is her first appearance in this Review.

KENNETH B. SAWYER, art critic for the *Baltimore Sun*, is at work on a book about contemporary American painting.

B. H. HAGGIN'S *Conversations with Toscanini* will be brought out in March by Doubleday.

MARCUS KLEIN teaches English at Barnard College and is at work on a critical study of contemporary fiction.

A new book by ROBERT MARTIN ADAMS, entitled *Strains of Discord: Studies in Literary Openness*, has recently been published by the Cornell University Press.

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